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MEDIEVAL MIRACLE WORKER

How **St Columba** transformed Christianity in Britain

HISTORY



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How Hitler's response
to the Japanese attack
doomed the Axis to defeat

Soundtrack of the Sixties

Why the Beatles were
in tune with British society

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have been deposed
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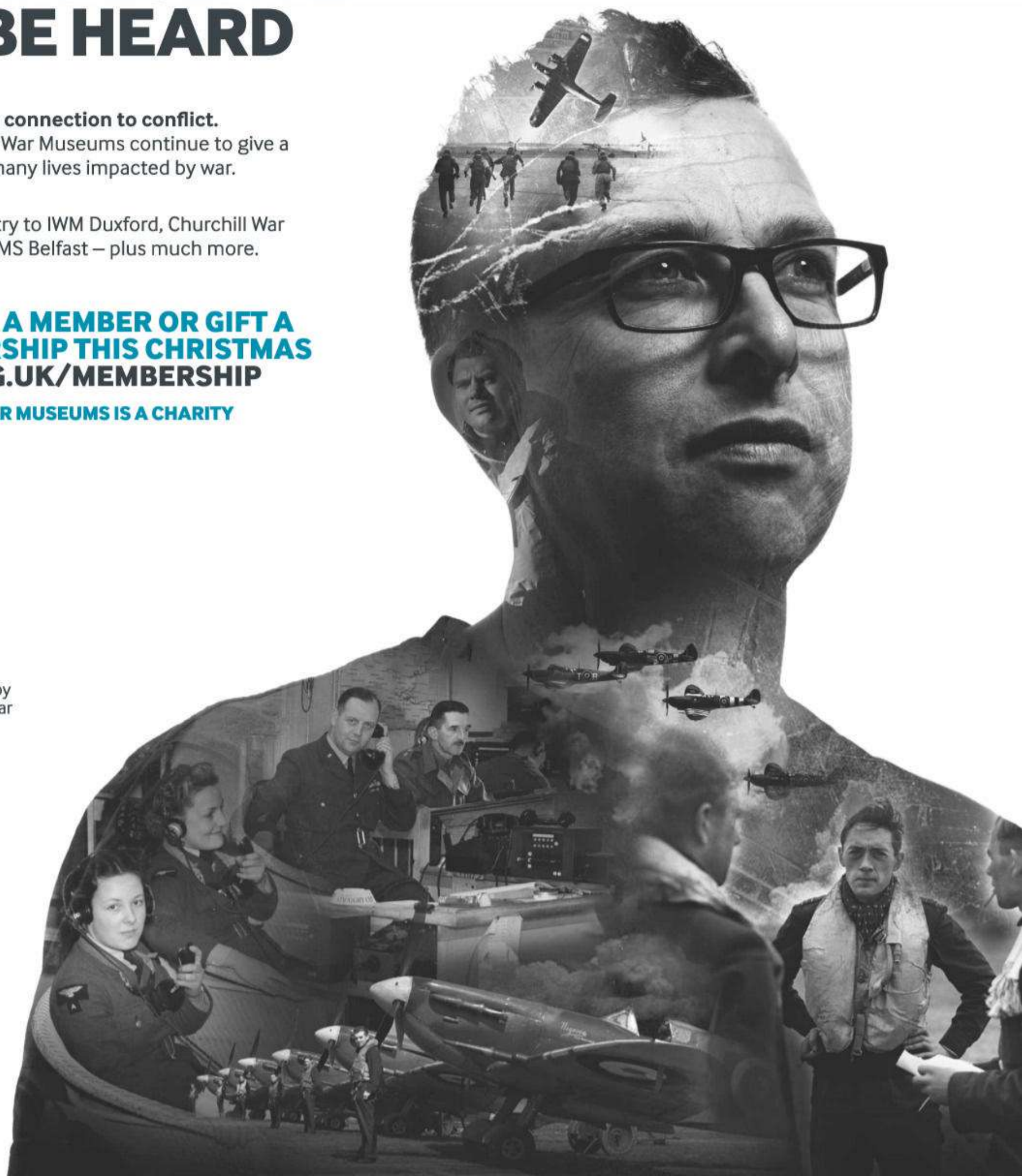
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PETE

"I'm fascinated by
Second World War
aviation."



“What was the turning point of the Second World War? Arguments have been made for a number of episodes, ranging from the defeat of the Luftwaffe at the Battle of Britain to the Soviet victory at Stalingrad. Yet many historians point to a **crucial few days in December 1941**. That was when the German assault on Moscow stalled and Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor brought the industrial behemoth of the **US into war with the Axis**. In this month’s issue we reflect on this pivotal period, as we reach the 80th anniversary.

On page 42, Christopher Harding takes a long view of Japan’s history to explain why the country decided to launch its aircraft against Hawaii. Then, on page 50, Klaus Schmider seeks to understand what’s often been viewed as Hitler’s greatest miscalculation: **the decision to declare war on the US** and join Japan in a seemingly unwinnable conflict.

By the time you’re reading this, I expect some of you will already be planning for this year’s Christmas dinner. Turkeys tend to be the focus of the modern meal (for non-vegetarians, at least), but had you been living centuries ago you might have been tucking into beef, goose or even peacock. As Annie Gray reveals in her piece on page 30, some of our **Christmas dining traditions** aren’t that traditional at all.

And as this is our Christmas issue, you’ll also find our annual **Christmas quiz and prize crossword**, as well as our books of the year roundup, where experts select some of their favourite titles of 2021.

I hope you have a very Merry Christmas.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. A bed for the ages

While I’ve certainly been guilty of keeping mattresses beyond the recommended eight years, I’m not sure I’d get a good night’s sleep on the oldest surviving example, which is 77,000 years old (page 60).

2. The Beatles’ TV record

Of course, the Fab Four were incredibly popular in the US, but I hadn’t realised that an astonishing 73 million people watched the band on the *Ed Sullivan Show* (page 21).

3. A saint met a monster

The most surprising story that appears in our profile of St Columba was the moment where he encountered – and scared off – the Loch Ness Monster (page 29).



THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



Dominic Sandbrook

“Since they exploded into the national imagination in late 1962, the Beatles have been synonymous with both the sixties and British culture itself. Will we ever run out of things to say about them? I doubt it, somehow.”

Dominic runs through eight landmark moments in the Beatles’ career that defined British society in the sixties on page 18



Annie Gray

“I’m forever being asked about the history of Christmas dinner, so I’ve written a book about it. Food tells us so much about who we are and how our society works. Plus, lots of the recipes are delicious.”

Annie tucks in to the foods of Christmases past and explains why the traditional dinner was a long time in the making on page 30



Brianna Robertson-Kirkland

“Like the star-studded female pop singers of the 21st-century, the prima donnas of the Georgian era were overtly sexualised by the press. Their public portrayal says a lot about the social expectations of the day.”

Brianna reveals how Georgian prima donnas paid a high price for their celebrity status on page 36



Nadine Akkerman

“In my new book, the biography of Elizabeth Stuart, I want to show the strong-willed, fierce and politically savvy woman she was, rather than the tragic figure that fills the popular imagination.”

Nadine considers how close the daughter of James VI & I came to becoming Queen Elizabeth II on page 62

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Editorial historymagazine@historyextra.com

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In the **US/Canada**
you can contact us at:
PO Box 37495, Boone,
IA 50037, BHcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com,
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Brianna Robertson-Kirkland on how 18th-century A-listers paid a high price for their celebrity status

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By declaring war on the US, Hitler made a huge miscalculation.

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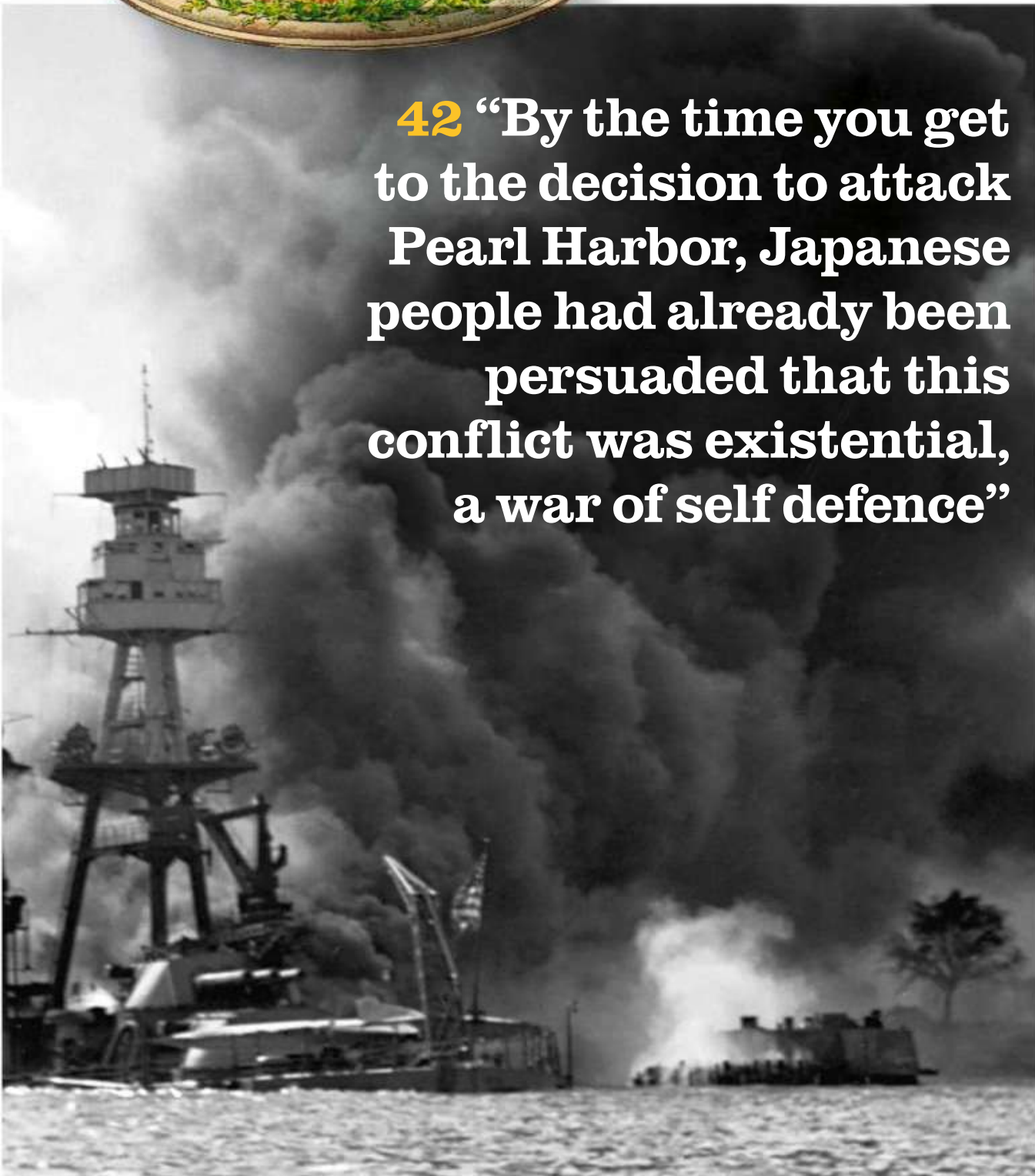
ROSALIND JANE/GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/ANTONIA REEVE





30

42 “By the time you get to the decision to attack Pearl Harbor, Japanese people had already been persuaded that this conflict was existential, a war of self defence”



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EYE-OPENER

A face from the past

The ongoing project to create the HS2 high-speed rail link between London and Birmingham has already unearthed remarkable archaeological discoveries, but few have been as extraordinary as a set of Roman-era sculptures found in Buckinghamshire late in October.

This statue of a woman, as well as sculptures of a man and a child, was uncovered in the ruins of St Mary's, a Norman church in the village of Stoke Mandeville. It was built in 1080 in a location that experts think was previously a Roman mausoleum.

Other finds include a glass jug with large pieces still intact, despite possibly having been in the ground for more than a millennium. Yet it's the set of figures that has prompted the most attention.

"The statues are exceptionally well preserved, and you really get an impression of the people they depict," said lead archaeologist Rachel Wood. "They're even more significant to us archaeologically because they've actually helped change our understanding of the site here before the medieval church was built." All three statues have now been sent for analysis by a team of specialists.

TALKING POINTS

Friends or enemies?



Recent headlines about diplomatic discord between England and France prompted Twitter historians to consider the two nations' longer relationship. **ANNA WHITELOCK** trawled the responses

Anglo-French rivalry can animate politicians and historians in equal measure – and while the former have been preoccupied with fishing disputes, the latter have been reflecting on the antecedents of this fractious relationship. **Ian Dunt** (@iandunt) remarked: “Quite apart from Brexit, fish etc, I find the whole Anglo-French rivalry so tiresome. [It] was really striking to me how connected [both nations] were in creating liberalism, and how those who did so – [Benjamin] Constant, [John Stuart] Mill – were so deeply invested in both countries.”

Dan Snow (@thehistoryguy) added his take on what he described as his “pet subject”, commenting: “Adam Smith discovered the physiocrats and laissez-faire in Paris; [18th-century scholar] Montesquieu [was] profoundly influenced by his time in Britain. The Duke of Bridgewater [was] inspired to build canals after a France visit. And Wellington learned to soldier as a student not at Eton, but in France.” **Arthur Dent** (@A4Dent) provided more recent examples, noting that Anglo-French “cooperation” created Concorde and the Channel Tunnel.

Elizabeth of Warwick (@oshaymoishe1) tweeted: “Sadly it’s a rivalry that goes back to the Norman conquest. Just mention the Hundred Years’ War or Agincourt and the English start to salivate.

War against France was the one way people would happily dig into their pockets to fund it.”

Tyler (@CasperoBull) was perplexed: “It’s all very strange, considering that post-1066, we were ruled by essentially a French dynasty for 400 years and adopted much of their culture and customs that formed our country... odd how some people keep fighting a 200-year-old war in their imagination.”

Shelagh Sneddon (@ShelaghSneddon) noted that, “It’s one of the biggest differences between Scotland and England. This animosity doesn’t really exist in Scotland, largely because France were our allies against England for much of the Middle Ages. As a result, it bewilders me whenever I meet it.” On this, **John Stanners** (@JohnStanners) said: “Do you think the problem England has with the French is due to the Auld Alliance [a 1295 alliance made between the kingdoms of Scotland and France]? It’s the only reason that I can think of for the current issues.”

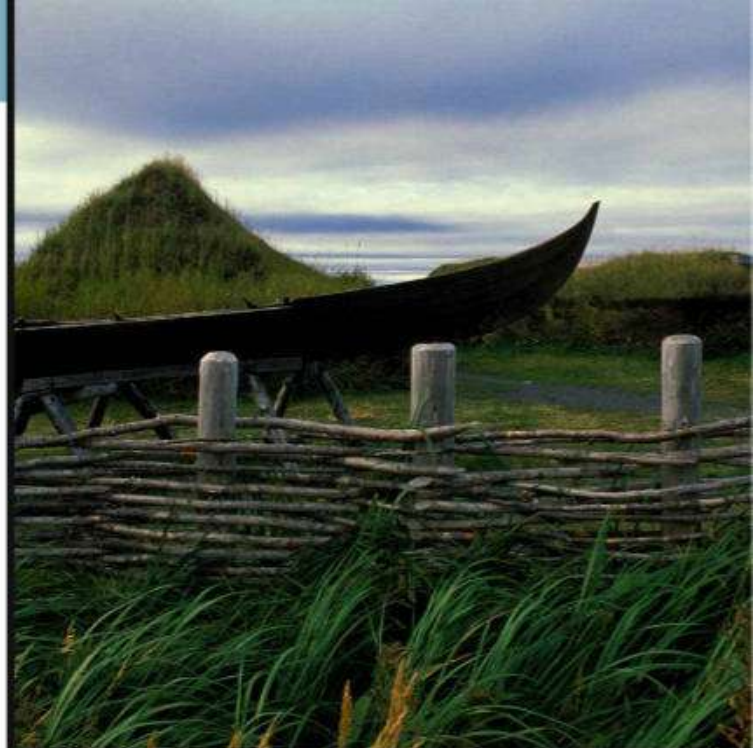
Tricia Greig (@Triciagreig2) was also among those to point to the Auld Alliance, noting that it “recognised close association and [agreed] in some measure to protect each other from English encroachment... [It was] never formally revoked”.

And so the discussion went on, with **pearsisido** (@PearsiSido) making perhaps the most pithy, although arguably the most controversial, contribution, asking: “Isn’t England basically French?” Answers on a postcard, or a tweet, please...

Anna Whitelock is chair in history at City, University of London

// This animosity doesn’t really exist in Scotland, largely because the French were our allies //

Join the debate at twitter.com/historyextra



Replicas of a boat and Norse houses at L'Anse aux Meadows in Canada. Experts have been studying the area's trees for new clues about Viking settlement

ARCHAEOLOGY

Vikings reached North America “in AD 1021”

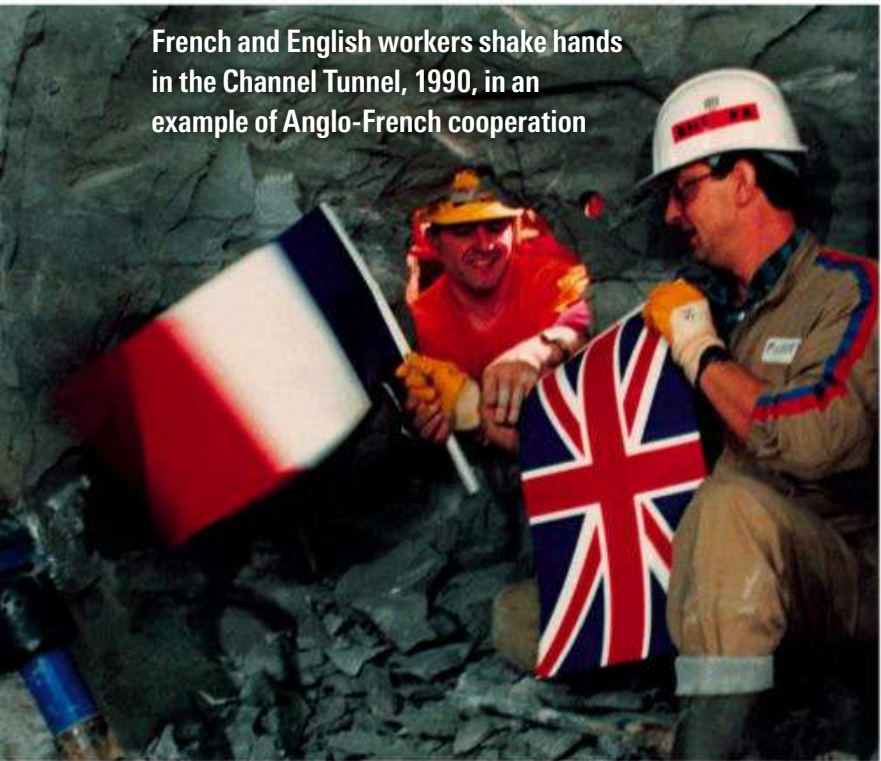
Although it’s long been known that the Vikings reached North America centuries before Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic, the date that they stepped foot on the continent has been an estimation. Now, evidence gleaned from ancient trees and a huge solar storm has for the first time pointed to a precise year: AD 1021.

Experts examined the rings of three logs cut from fir and juniper trees and used at L'Anse aux Meadows, the only confirmed Norse settlement in the Americas (on the east coast of Canada). Each features a ring bearing evidence of radiation, known as an atmospheric radiocarbon signal, generated during a documented solar storm in AD 993. In all three cases, growth rings were produced after that year – indicating that the trees were alive until AD 1021, when they were cut down. The fact that the wood was cut and modified using metal tools of a kind not used by the area’s indigenous inhabitants points to the trees having been felled by Viking settlers.

Previous analysis of archaeological remains and artefacts at the site in Newfoundland, which was first excavated during the 1960s, had suggested that it was populated in the 10th or 11th centuries. Yet this is the first time that experts have been able to precisely date a Norse settlement on the continent – offering a definitive point around which to construct chronologies not just of Viking exploration, but also of wider studies of human travel across the Atlantic.

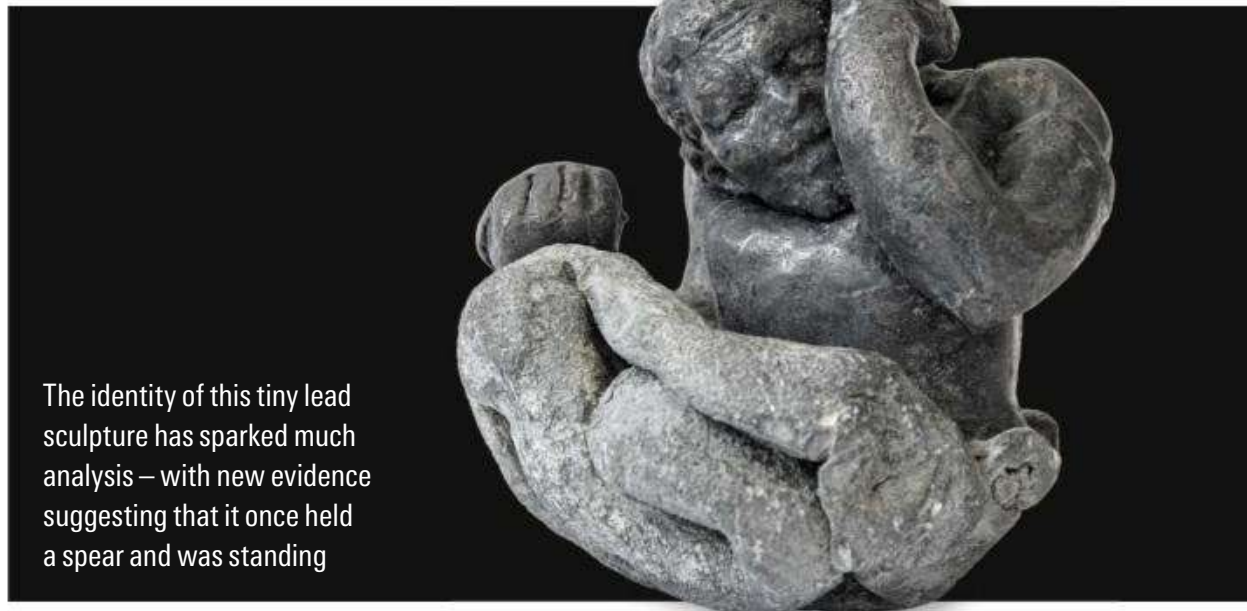
GETTY IMAGES

French and English workers shake hands in the Channel Tunnel, 1990, in an example of Anglo-French cooperation



HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**



The identity of this tiny lead sculpture has sparked much analysis – with new evidence suggesting that it once held a spear and was standing

▲ Research suggests “wrestler” is actually an African warrior

A Roman-era figurine long thought to be a wrestler instead depicts an African warrior, new analysis indicates. The 55mm-high figure made of lead was discovered in the 1920s at Wall Roman Site in Staffordshire, and is thought to have been made near the Mediterranean in the first century AD.

The pained grimace on the face meant that when the object was first found, experts believed it to show the suffering of an enslaved person. Opinion shifted in the 1990s, when the individual’s apparent seated position was seen as evidence that it was

instead a representation of a wrestling pose. The latest study, however, carried out by English Heritage curator Cameron Moffett has revealed the presence of a socket in the figure’s right hand, into which a spear-like weapon would have fitted – a common depiction of African men in art of the period.

The apparent incongruity of the individual sitting down, meanwhile, is thought to be explained by the artefact having been made from a soft metal. It was originally standing, but was distorted by heat at some point between its creation and its discovery.

Diver finds “crusader sword” off the coast of Israel ▼

A 900-year-old sword spotted by an amateur diver in the Mediterranean Sea belonged to a crusader knight, it is believed. The warm waters of the natural cove near the Israeli city of Haifa mean that the one-metre blade is well-preserved – albeit covered in marine organisms stuck to its oxidised iron. Experts believe the sword dates from the Third Crusade, the bid by European powers to retake Jerusalem between 1189 and 1192 after its capture by Saladin. The sword is now set to be cleaned, restored and analysed before going on display.



Marine archaeologist Kobi Sharvit with the shell-encrusted sword, which weighs 1.8 kilograms

▼ Archaeologists find huge Byzantine wine complex

The largest wine-making complex from the Byzantine period has been uncovered in Israel. Capable of producing 2 million litres of wine a year, and featuring five presses, pottery kilns and warehouses for bottling and aging, its size surprised the archaeologists who discovered it at a site near Tel Aviv during a two-year dig. The complex was operational roughly 1,500 years ago, and its proximity to Gaza means that experts think it may have produced *vinum Gazetum*, or “Gaza wine”, a white variety praised in literature of the era.



The complex features five presses, each of which spanned more than 200 square metres



The ancient tablet features an image, outlined here in white, of a spirit being led into the afterlife

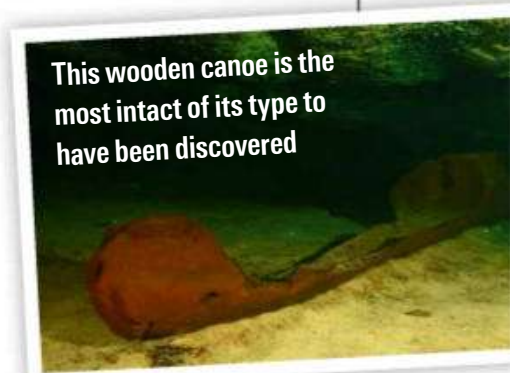
▲ Babylonian tablet features “earliest drawing of a ghost”

Belief in the supernatural is a common thread across civilisations – and now new evidence has emerged of the first depiction of a ghost from 3,500 years ago. The image (pictured above) is on an ancient Babylonian clay tablet held at the British Museum, and dates from 1500 BC. Only evident when viewed from a particular angle, it shows a bearded spirit being led by a female figure back into the afterlife, and is part of a guide to exorcising ghosts, which, in this case, suggests that the remedy might be to find the spirit a lover.

Ancient Maya canoe is “almost completely intact” ▼

A wooden Maya canoe found submerged in a freshwater pool in southern Mexico is the most intact example of its kind to be discovered, according to archaeologists. The craft, which is 1.6 metres long, was discovered near the ruined city of Chichén Itzá, and has been tentatively dated to between AD 830 and 950, towards the end of the era in which the Maya reached their peak. It’s thought that the canoe may have been used to transport water or ritual offerings – and, indeed, other finds made at the site include a ritual knife, along with ceramics and murals.

Experts will now carry out analysis of the wood used to craft the canoe so as to determine more precisely when it was made, while a team will create a 3D model in order to make replicas for further study. **H**



This wooden canoe is the most intact of its type to have been discovered



MICHAEL WOOD ON...

JAMES BOND'S PLACE IN BRITISH CULTURE

// Bond's role grew out of proportion to Britain's standing in the world //

We had a family trip to our local cinema the other week to see the new James Bond film. How nice to be back, however briefly it may be, in “live” cinema. The film, *No Time to Die*, had gripping action sequences and an engaging emotional plotline, ending with Bond saving not only HMG, but the entire planet. After the credits had rolled, I found myself musing about the role of 007 in postwar British culture.

.....
Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

BBC

Born in 1908, Bond's creator, Ian Fleming, was educated at Eton and served as an officer in Naval Intelligence during the Second World War. He had grown up on John Buchan's Richard Hannay novels (which started with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in 1915) and the mass market thrillers written by HC McNeile, or “Sapper”, whose hero, Bulldog Drummond, appeared on the first cover in 1920 as “detective, patriot, hero and gentleman!”

At a loose end following the war, Fleming's brilliant idea was to update Drummond to the postwar world, a place of BOAC passenger jets, casinos and consumerism. Readers may recall the brand names, the hand-made cigarettes by Morlands of Grosvenor Street, the dry martinis (shaken, not stirred) and the sports cars. Fleming was an upper-class man of his time and in Bond he created the most popular action hero ever.

The first novel, *Casino Royale*, was published in 1953

– a time of Cold War, austerity, rationing and the decline of empire, viewed by many, including Fleming, with regret. Voted back as prime minister, Winston Churchill was now in his late 70s, a voice from an already receding past. In Bond's third outing, *Moonraker* (1955), when Gala Brand hears Churchill at the end of the phone, she reveres him as “the voice of all the great occasions of her life”.

In the early books, the enemy was Russia, with Britain on the frontline. In Fleming's world, Britain was still a leader in ingenuity, courage and sangfroid. But by the time *From Russia with Love* was published in 1957, the Suez debacle had taken place and Britain's decline was writ large. So Fleming invented a new enemy, a vast international criminal network with supervillains: from then on, Bond was fighting not Russia, but SPECTRE.

Critics were divided over the books. Many thought Fleming helped push the agenda of a permissive society that was arriving in the 1960s (although feminist critics would have their own say about Bond), and as one reviewer put it, Fleming's work was a mix of “sex, snobbery and sadism”. That did not stop the Bond novels from becoming a literary phenomenon.

In 1965, the year after Fleming died, Churchill's state funeral drew a line under Britain's decline, but Bond went from strength to strength. The first movie, *Dr No*, starring Sean Connery, had been released in 1962 and launched one of the most lucrative franchises in cinema history. The Cold War roots were abandoned for fantasy adventure laced with glamorous locations and hi-tech gizmos. Bond's role grew out of all proportion to Britain's standing in the world, so much so that by 2012 the Queen acted a scene with Daniel Craig's Bond at Buckingham Palace and (via a stunt double) parachuted into the Olympic Stadium. It was a brilliant and playful melding of myth and reality.

For, like George and the Dragon, Bond has indeed become a myth. And myths don't die easily, especially not when they flatter us with the idea that Britannia can still punch above her weight. It is interesting to chart the increasing divergence between fantasy and reality especially now, as Britain is being reinvented as a world-beating country where decline never happened at all.

Suspending disbelief is, of course, the name of the game with Bond films. But in the nearly 70 years since Fleming published *Casino Royale*, we have moved a long way from the Cold War spy thriller, as the 25th instalment ends with Bond cornering the villain on his island hideaway between Japan and Russia and calling in the Royal Navy to rain down missiles in a grand denouement.

The finale seems to encapsulate the message of the new film, reflected in its title, *No Time to Die*. For in the fantasy, despite everything, the old British spirit seen in characters like Richard Hannay and Bulldog Drummond still lives – and is unconquered. ■



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ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place at Christmas in history

26 DECEMBER 1908

Jack Johnson crushes the competition

*The boxer becomes the first
black heavyweight champ*

In the autumn of 1908, Jack Johnson could reasonably claim to be the best boxer in the world. The son of a formerly enslaved mother and father, he had been a professional boxer for a decade, in which time he had won dozens of fights and secured the World Colored Heavyweight Championship in 1903. By rights, he should have had a shot at the overall world crown. But the reigning champion, James L. Jeffries, refused to face a black man.

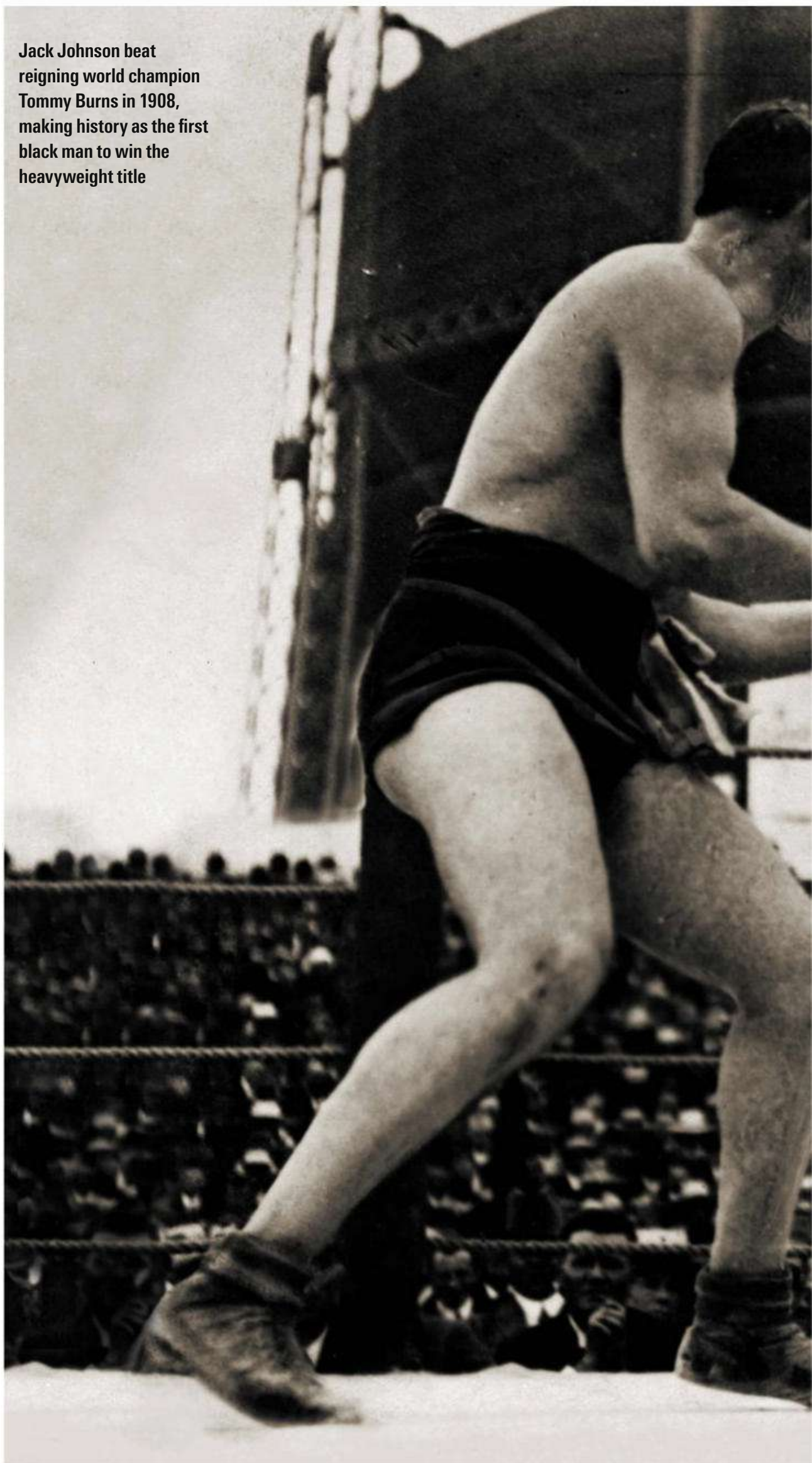
At last, at the end of 1908, Johnson's chance came. The title had passed to the Canadian boxer Tommy Burns, who demanded a whopping \$30,000 for a bout against Johnson. An Australian businessman called Hugh McIntosh agreed to put up the cash, and the fight was scheduled – aptly enough – for Boxing Day, at the Sydney Stadium.

It was immediately obvious to the estimated 20,000 spectators that Johnson held the upper hand. Not only was he half a foot taller and 24 pounds heavier than his opponent, he was in far better shape – although, to be fair, Burns had just recovered from flu. For 14 rounds, Johnson battered mercilessly away, reducing Burns to mouthing racial insults through a veil of blood. At last, the police stepped in to put a stop to the demolition, and Johnson became the first black world heavyweight champion.

His victory sent shockwaves around the world, with some American papers complaining that black men would now claim equality with their white counterparts. Johnson himself was admirably gracious towards his defeated opponent. When he visited the Canadian city of Vancouver a few months later, he told an audience that he respected Burns for having had the courage to face him. “He has done what no one else ever did,” Johnson said. “He gave a black man a chance for the championship. He was beaten, but he was game.” **H**

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Dominic Sandbrook's new series of history books for children, *Adventures in Time* (Particular Books), is available now

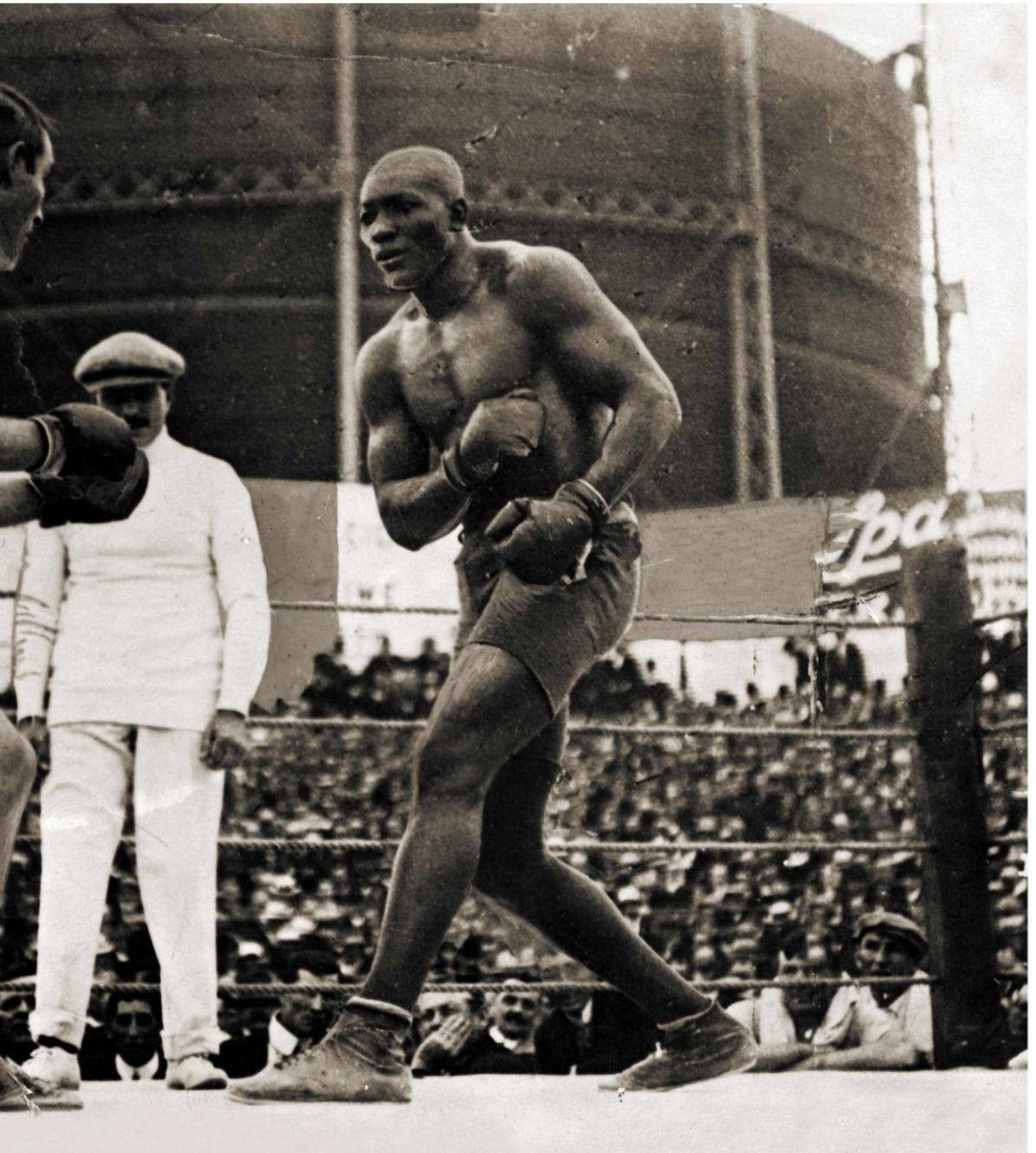
Jack Johnson beat reigning world champion Tommy Burns in 1908, making history as the first black man to win the heavyweight title



BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

25 DECEMBER 1758

The German astronomer **Johann Georg Palitzsch** spots **Halley's Comet** – the first recorded sighting of a comet that had been predicted beforehand, in this case by the Astronomer Royal, Edmund Halley, in 1705.





HIDDEN HISTORIES

EMMA DABIRI explores lesser-known stories from our past

// He dreamed a career that seemed impossible and made it a reality //

Edgar Mittelholzer was a Guyanese novelist who should be remembered not just for the quality of his writing, but as the earliest recorded writer from the

Caribbean to make his living from the profession. I studied Caribbean literature at university, yet I don't recall his name coming up in my studies. In fact, I came across him quite by chance thanks to a reference to his eerie ghost story, *My Bones and My Flute*, in Adam Curtis's recent documentary *Can't Get You Out of My Head*. As an avid reader of ghost stories, I was intrigued by this Caribbean writer as most of the canon has been written by European and Anglo-American authors.

Race had a hugely formative influence on Mittelholzer's life. Born in 1909 in what was then British Guiana, his father was of Swiss-German origin while his mother was from a light-skinned "multi-racial" family in Martinique. In a race-obsessed colonial context, the Mittelholzers had firmly established themselves as a "white" family, but their son – while still "light-skinned" – was the darkest, with features revealing him to be unmistakably of African descent. His presence was a source of deep shame for the family – a "momentous disappointment" for his father, in particular. "I was the Dark One at whom he was always frowning and barking," wrote Mittelholzer.

The pressures of repressive colonial society affected Mittelholzer profoundly. To the further disappointment of his father, the young boy retreated into reading and writing, becoming fixated on finding a London publisher for his work. Caribbean writing was dismissed at the time

as a contradiction in the colonial metropolis, and Mittelholzer was subject to rejection after rejection, which likely compounded the rejection he experienced within his own family. He persisted. In 1938, he wrote *Corentyne Thunder* and at the end of that year received the positive response he had sought for so long.

Seemingly plagued by bad luck, however, the outbreak of the Second World War shut down any chance of immediate publication or even regular communication with his publisher. *Corentyne Thunder* was eventually published in 1941, but no sooner had the finished copies arrived in the warehouse than it was bombed, with only the handful of copies already sent to reviewers surviving.

During this period, Mittelholzer relocated to Trinidad and worked for the Trinidad Royal Volunteer Naval Reserve, before being discharged (for what would now likely be diagnosed as clinical depression). With prospects looking unpromising, he decided to emigrate to the UK, embarking on the voyage in 1948 accompanied by his first wife Roma Halfhide and their young daughter. For a while, it looked like things were on the up. Working as a typist at the British Council, he met Leonard Woolf, Virginia's widower, whose imprint, Hogarth Press, published *A Morning in the Office*, Mittelholzer's sharply observed social commentary dealing with class and colourism in a Trinidad office. When two more of his novels followed in 1951 and 1952, he was finally able to fulfil a lifelong dream of quitting his job to become a full-time writer.

In the next nine years, Mittelholzer published 13 books with Secker & Warburg. But finances remained precarious and he moved around a lot, traversing the Atlantic from Canada to Barbados with an un-rootedness that perhaps found its origins in his own. His marriage broke down and he remarried in 1960, this time to an English woman named Jacqueline Pointer. Increasingly poor mental health, paranoia, anxiety and depression, combined with racism he undoubtedly faced in the publishing industry and broader British society, took its toll.

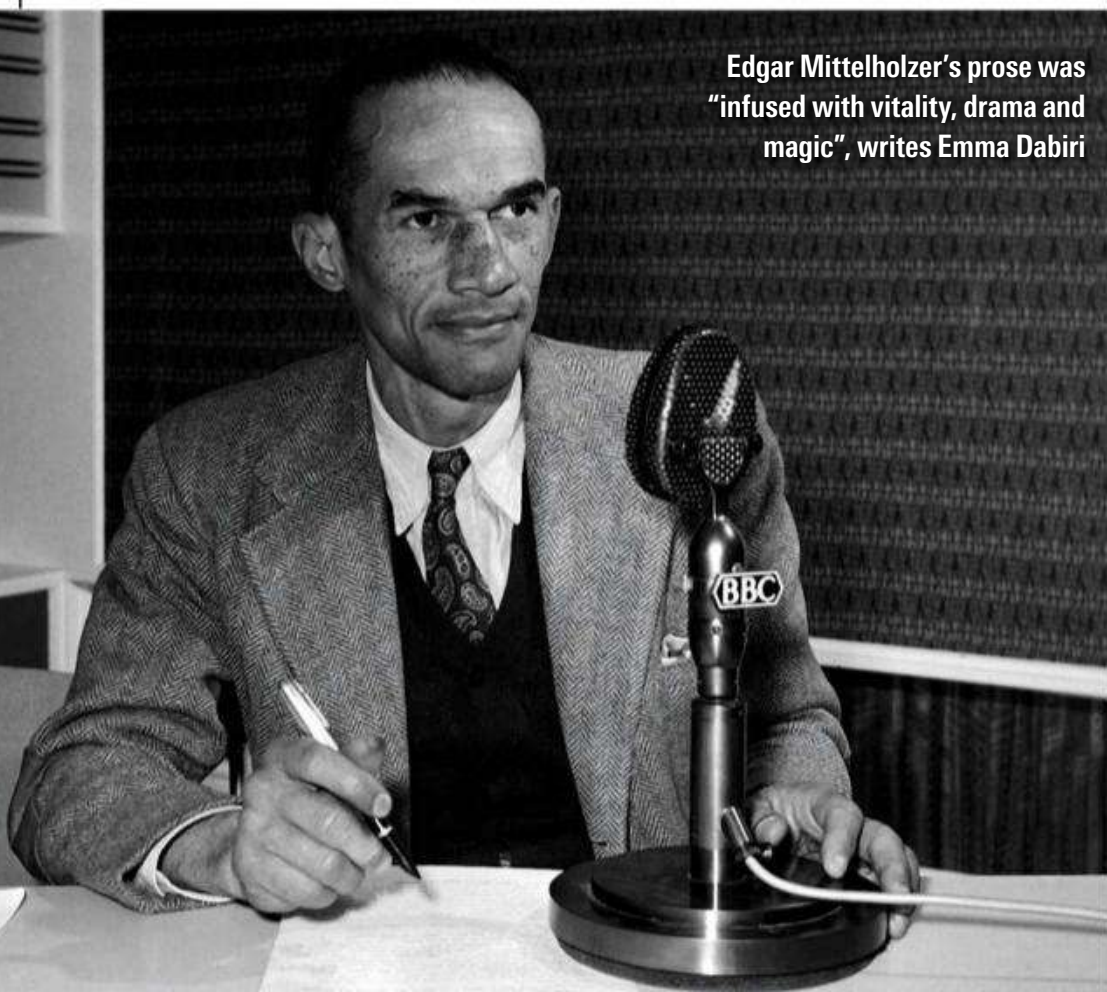
His work became increasingly mystical and right wing and his publisher soon cut ties with him, after which he struggled to find another. In his final novel, *The Jilkington Drama*, published posthumously, the main protagonist immolates himself to escape insanity. Mittelholzer himself met with a similar fate. On 5 May 1965, in a field in Surrey, the Caribbean's first successful literary export drenched himself in petrol and lit a match.

Mittelholzer's troubled life and sad demise should not overshadow his contribution to literature. He was a keen observer of the complexities of the Caribbean colonial society, with a rare gift for rendering the region's landscapes in prose infused with vitality, drama and magic. In a world with no blueprint for what he wanted to achieve, he dreamed of a career that seemed impossible, and made it reality. **H**

Emma Dabiri

is an author and broadcaster, and teaching fellow at SOAS University of London. Her most recent book is *What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition* (Penguin, 2021)

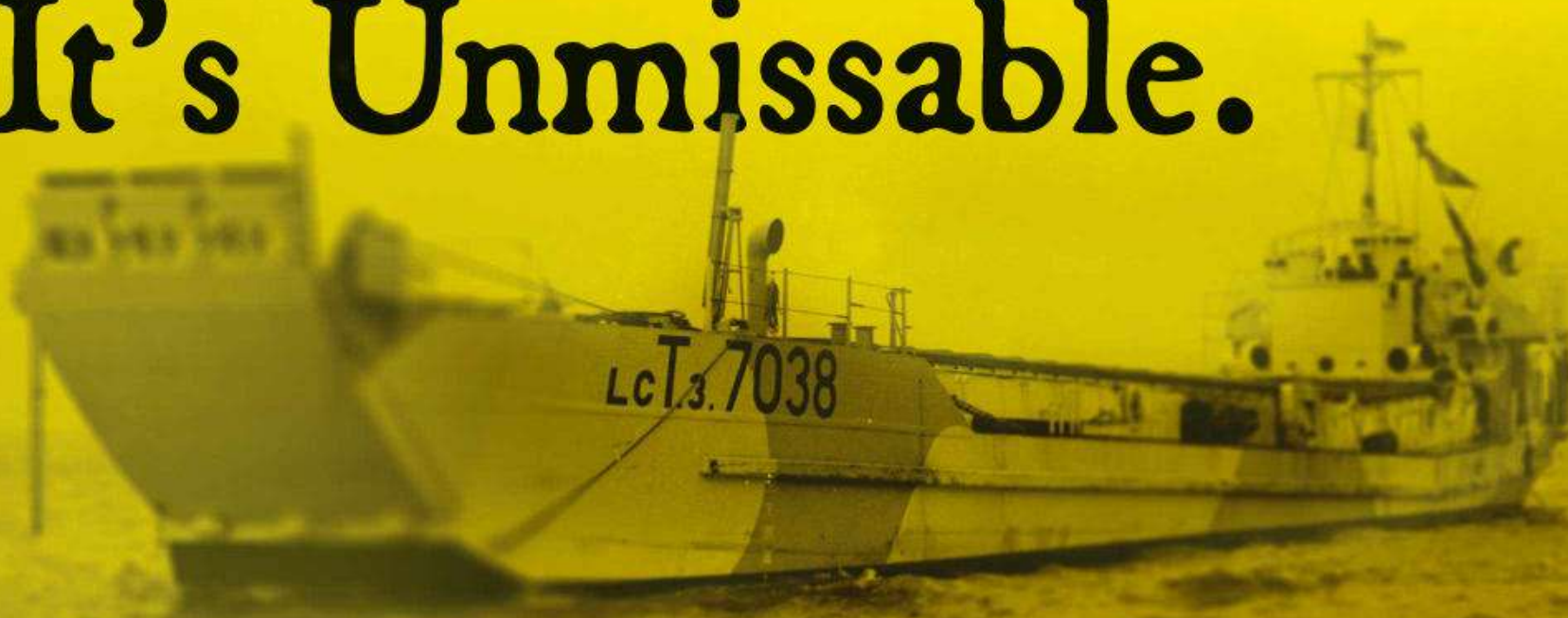
Edgar Mittelholzer's prose was "infused with vitality, drama and magic", writes Emma Dabiri



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Peru, Inca, about 1500.

LETTERS

A herd of goats was believed
to have suffered a deadly fate
at the hands of one of reader
Guy Sinclair's ancestors



Adam Driver and Matt Damon face off in *The Last Duel* – a historical practice explored by reader Douglas Bell

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Legal battles

I read with interest Hannah Skoda's feature about the trial by combat between Jean de Carrouges and Jacques Le Gris (*Medieval Duels*, November). It has certainly made an exciting film [*The Last Duel*, released in October in UK cinemas].

The article explained that this wasn't "the last duel" and that the practice continued into the 1580s. However, as late as 1817 such a law was used by a certain Abraham Thornton of Warwickshire to defend himself from accusations of murder. He had been tried and found not guilty of murdering Mary Ashford. Her brother-in-law, William Ashford, was so incensed by this apparent miscarriage of justice that he used an ancient law to issue a private writ of appeal. Thornton was thus imprisoned in Warwick jail to await another trial.

After consulting a lawyer, he was advised to petition for a trial by battle. In November of that year, he appeared before the Lord Chief Justice and successfully proved he had the right to "trial by battle" against his accuser. It soon became clear that in any physical contest Thornton would have the better of it. Ashford refused to accept the challenge, and Thornton walked free. There wasn't an actual battle, but the law clearly still stood. As a result of this case, it was repealed two years later.

Douglas Bell, Manchester



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is *The Ruin of Witches* by Malcolm Gaskill, one of the titles included in our Books of the Year feature starting on page 70

A family tragedy

I read with interest the review of Jon Callow's book, *The Last Witches of England* (November), about the three "witches" of Bideford.

Ingeborg Knutsdatter, my Norwegian great (x8) grandmother, who lived in the area of Elverum some 90 miles north-east of Oslo, was burnt at the stake for witchcraft in May 1625. Some four months earlier, her son, Peder, had suffered the same fate. Like his brother-in-law James VI & I, Christian IV, king of Denmark and Norway since 1588, was very active in the suppression of witchcraft and sorcery in his country.

Among the charges against Ingeborg at her trial in March 1625 were that she had bewitched a former local church minister's son; been responsible for the death of an entire herd of goats belonging to Peder's wife; and, with the aid of a magic ointment, had been seen riding a goat one night accompanied by Peder on a pig. At more than 70 years old, the poor woman was doubtless confused by the court's proceedings, and when asked if it had been a very long time since she had had dealings with the devil, she condemned herself by answering that this was so.

A review of the trial was held on 19 May 1625 and she was sentenced to death.

Guy Sinclair, Nottingham

War games

I enjoyed the feature on Alexander the Great (*The World's First Superhero*, December). I've always had an interest in Alexander (pictured below), because his is such a fascinating story. The point about his army refusing to carry on reminds me of a skit from *Horrible Histories* in which they show this episode as a board game with various expansion boards – and in the end the actors who are playing give up. They also wrote a catchy song about Alexander which I highly recommend, as you pick up a lot of information when listening to it!

Grace Toner, Edinburgh



Revenge of the Scots?

Andrew Roberts successfully refutes the American myth that George III was a tyrant (*America's Fall Guy*, November) by acknowledging that he acted as a constitutional monarch under the authority of parliament. Where then did the myth of tyranny spring from? I'd argue that it derives from the defeat of the Scots at Culloden in 1746.

After Culloden, many Scots, including sympathisers of Charles Stuart, fled to the American colonies, and a mere 30 years separated Culloden from the American Revolution. Given the high population of Scots in the American colonies, it should not be surprising that the myth of British tyranny was fomented among this group. To put it bluntly, the American Revolution was the Scots' revenge for defeat at Culloden.

Timothy Jacobs, Eastbourne

Terms of endearment

When I read your correction from "silly" to "stilly" in the Victorian hymn 'Oft in the Stilly Night' (*Letters*, December), I wondered if you were inadvertently correct, as "silly" is an example of a word whose meaning has changed completely since the 12th century, when it meant happy or blessed. It became synonymous with innocence, which led to it meaning somebody who was weak or unsophisticated – and thence ignorant and lacking sense. (However, the hymn does, in fact, use the word "stilly".)

The word "nice" is another example. In the 14th century it meant "foolish", often with reference to extravagant dress. It went on to mean well-dressed or precise and, later, to having refined tastes. I wonder if today's slang words such as "sick" and "wicked" will alter their meaning over time.

Lois McGill, Derbyshire

Keeping the faith

BBC History Magazine is a wonderful publication that I've enjoyed since its first issue. Yet I have to respond to the article on *Going to Church in the Middle Ages* (November), in particular its first section: "Why was attending church so important?" The comparison with today is an obvious one to make, and while it may not be fashionable or deemed relevant to attend church anymore, I do object to the implication that churches are now separated from science, sociology and politics, or from education, morality and charity in the parish.

Churches are incredibly important as meeting points for parishioners, and for the social groups and interactions that take



A community market outside the Church of St Michael and all Angels in the Norfolk town of Aylsham. Reader Sean Russell argues that churches continue to play a key role in public life across the UK

place. It may be said that churches should stick to theology, but thank God they don't. **Sean Russell**, London

Corrections

► In December's *Explorer* piece on the Imperial War Museum's new Second World War and Holocaust galleries, we incorrectly captioned an Enigma machine as a typewriter used by Arthur Seyss-Inquart. Thanks to reader Dennis Atkins for pointing this out.

► In *The Road to Partition* (December), we made reference to "six Protestant-majority counties in the north of Ireland". A more accurate version would have been: "a Protestant-majority six-county area". Thanks to reader Brian Thornton for spotting this error, which was introduced during the editing process and was not the fault of the feature's author, Charles Townshend.

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We welcome your letters, while reserving the right to edit them. We may publish your letters on our website. Please include a daytime phone number and, if emailing, a postal address (not for publication). Letters should be no longer than 250 words. **Email:** letters@historyextra.com **Post:** Our office is currently closed, so unfortunately we can only receive email communication at this time

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Editor Rob Attar robertattar@historyextra.com
Deputy editor Matt Elton mattelton@historyextra.com
Production editor Spencer Mizen
Podcast editor Ellie Cawthorne
Section editor Rhiannon Davies
Picture editor Samantha Nott samnott@historyextra.com
Group art editor Susanne Frank
Senior deputy art editor Rachel Dickens
Content director Dr David Musgrove
Acting digital editor Elinor Evans
Digital section editors Rachel Dinning & Kev Lochun

Fact-checkers: Dr Robert Blackmore, John Evans, Dr Fay Glinister, Josette Reeves, Daniel Adamson, Daniel Watkins, Rowena Cockett
Picture consultant: Everett Sharp

ADVERTISING & MARKETING

Advertising manager
 Sam Jones 0117 300 8145
Sam.Jones@immediate.co.uk
Senior brand sales executive
 Sam Evanson 0117 300 8544
Brand sales executive
 Sarah Luscombe 0117 300 8530
Sarah.Luscombe@immediate.co.uk
Group direct marketing manager
 Laurence Robertson 00353 5787 57444
Subscriptions director Jacky Perales-Morris
Subscriptions marketing manager
 Kevin Slaughter
US representative Kate Buckley
buckley@buckleypell.com

PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

PR manager Emma Cooney 0117 300 8507
Emma.Cooney@immediate.co.uk

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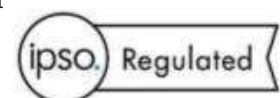
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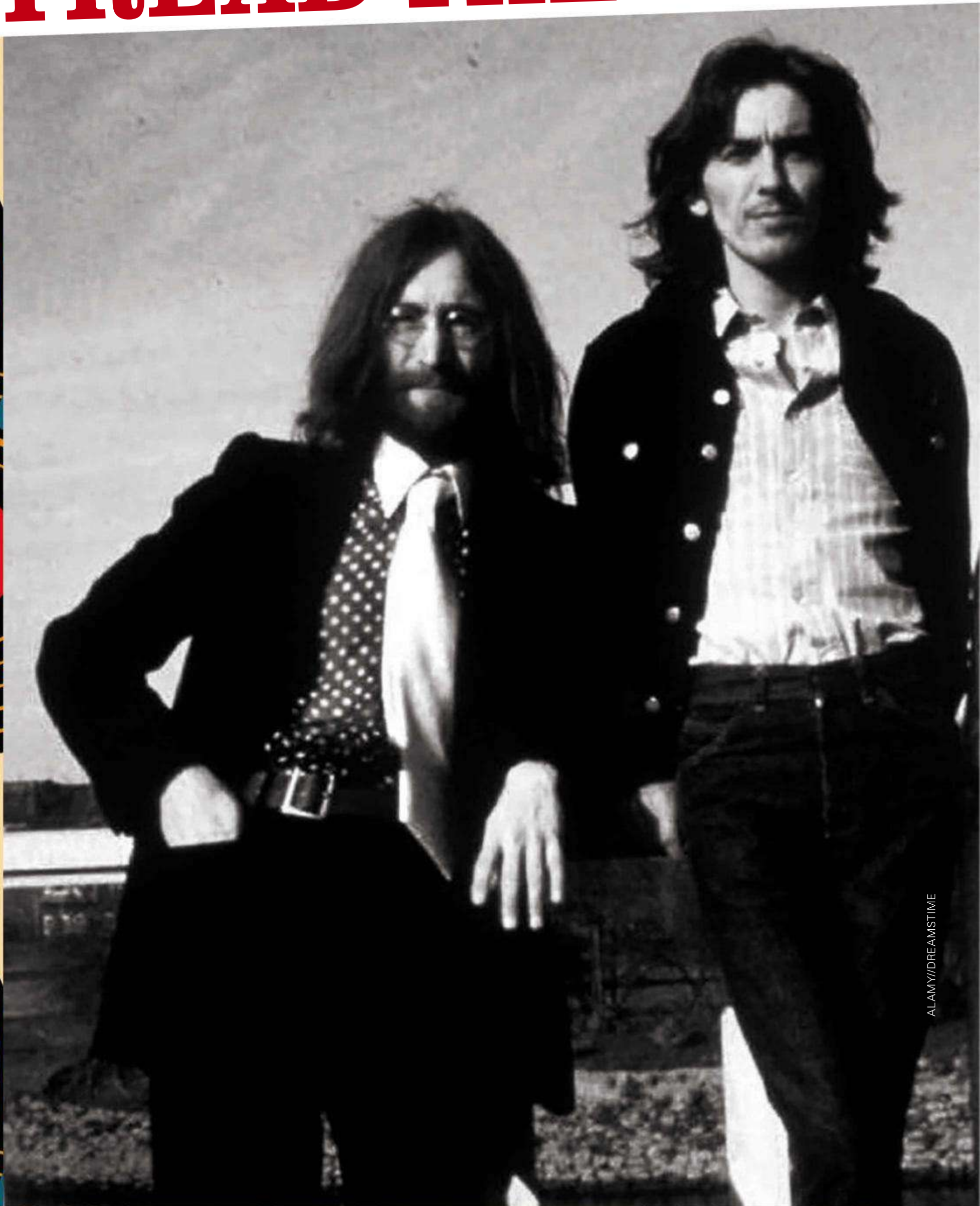
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► Page 68



The Beatles

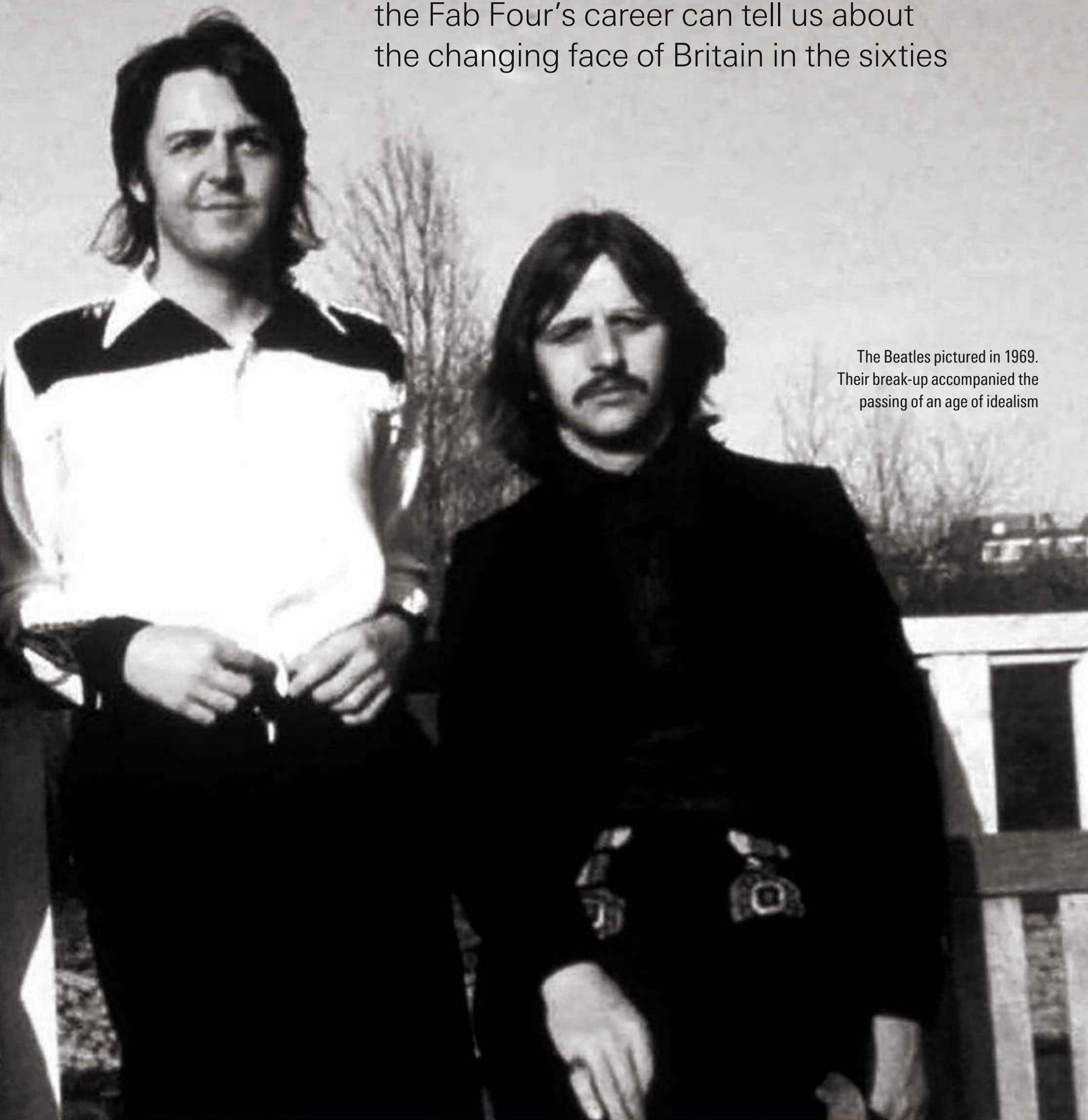
“I READ THE NEWS



ALAMY/DREAMSTIME

TODAY, OH BOY”

On the release of *Get Back*, Peter Jackson’s new documentary on the Beatles, **Dominic Sandbrook** reveals what eight landmark moments in the Fab Four’s career can tell us about the changing face of Britain in the sixties



The Beatles pictured in 1969. Their break-up accompanied the passing of an age of idealism

1 John and Paul's big bang moment

WOOLTON CHURCH FETE, 6 JULY 1957

It was a sunny afternoon in the summer of 1957, and all seemed right with the world. Twelve years after the end of the Second World War, Harold Macmillan's Britain was booming, the economy buoyant, the "affluent society" in full swing. And in the comfortable Liverpool suburb of Woolton, everybody was looking forward to the St Peter's parish church fete, a highlight of the summer calendar.

On the surface, it all seemed entirely unremarkable, a sign of the underlying conservatism of British life in the late 1950s. The band of the Cheshire Yeomanry led a procession through the streets, and floats of Scouts and Guides, Cubs and Brownies, Morris dancers and schoolchildren in fancy dress all followed in their wake. In the field behind the church a makeshift stage had been set up, surrounded by stalls selling home-made cakes and sweets, fruit and vegetables and hardware, and sideshows like bagatelle, hoopla and shilling-in-the-bucket.

Here was fifties Britain in miniature: an affluent, booming society, but also an

intensely nostalgic, self-consciously traditional one, caught between the consolations of the past and the excitements of the future. It was only from this world, with its blend of old and new, that the Beatles could ever have emerged.

And it was here, just after four o'clock, that the 15-year-old Paul McCartney had a meeting that would change his life. A keen musical enthusiast, McCartney had come to the fete hoping to meet some girls, but he had also heard reports of a local skiffle band called the Quarry Men, fronted by a teenager called John Lennon. And as he strolled onto the field, the Quarry Men were already on stage, playing a recent hit by the Del-Vikings.

When the band had finished – yielding the stage to a display by the City of Liverpool Police Dogs – the two boys went over to the church hall for a chat. When McCartney did his Gene Vincent and Little Richard impersonations, borrowing a guitar and reeling off lyrics and chord changes from memory, Lennon's eyes widened with admiration. Two weeks later, he invited McCartney to join the band. And with that, the most celebrated collaboration in pop music history was born.



John Lennon plays with the Quarry Men in Woolton on the day that he and Paul McCartney first crossed paths



Mood music: 'Love Me Do', one of the earliest Lennon-McCartney collaborations, which perfectly captures their teenage optimism.



Paul McCartney with then Beatles bassist Stuart Sutcliffe in Hamburg, 1960. The group's residency in the city was a symbol of the globalisation of pop culture

2 A rough new world for youth culture

HAMBURG, 17 AUGUST 1960

On the evening of 17 August 1960, a battered cream and green Austin van sputtered into the German city of Hamburg. In the back were the five young members of a band called the Beatles – Lennon, McCartney, George Harrison, Stuart Sutcliffe and Pete Best. None had been to Germany before. But they had just agreed a deal to play for three months in a Hamburg nightclub – and not surprisingly, they were feeling nervous.

For a young Englishman at the turn of the 1960s, Hamburg could hardly have been more exotic. It was a port city, famed for its club scene, red-light district and rough-edged atmosphere. The newcomers played at the Indra club, a dingy cellar that doubled as a strip joint. Often their audiences consisted only of the local prostitutes and their clients.

Yet the Beatles' Hamburg residency was part of a wider story – a symbol not just of the globalisation of popular culture, and of Britain's deep links with mainland Europe, but of the expanding horizons that travel, entertainment and the nascent mass-market youth culture brought for so many young people in the early 60s.

With Britain's skiffle market saturated, canny promoters had started bringing bands to the continent to entertain sailors and American soldiers in major West German towns. In Hamburg alone the curious punter might expect to see Dave Lee and the Staggerlees from Cornwall or the Nashville Teens from Weybridge. And it was here that the Beatles became used to dressing up and playing in front of a live crowd. It was in Hamburg, in other words, that they grew up.

3 All hail the darlings of the establishment

ROYAL VARIETY PERFORMANCE, 4 NOVEMBER 1963

Despite the headlong economic growth of the day, Britain in the early 60s often seemed an intensely deferential, backward-looking society. Few cultural occasions loomed larger than the annual Royal Variety Performance, and invitations were highly prized. Never, though, had there been bigger crowds than those assembling outside the Prince of Wales Theatre, Leicester Square, on the evening of 4 November 1963. Most were in their teens, and the vast majority were girls. And they had come to see only one act: the Beatles.

By this point, the Beatles were already very well known, having broken through to nationwide success at the turn of the year. By the autumn of 1963, 'She Loves You' was top of the *NME* singles chart, 'Twist and Shout' was top of the EP chart, and *Please Please Me* was top of the LP chart. But it was their debut at the Royal Variety Performance that really turned the Beatles into household names. When ITV broadcast the tape of the concert a few days later, almost 26 million people tuned in. "Night of Triumph for Four Young Men," was the *Daily Mail's* verdict. "Yes – the Royal Box was stomping."

The irony is that only a few years earlier, most newspapers had been sworn foes of rock and roll. But now they embraced the Beatles as national heroes. "You have to be a real sour square not to love the nutty, noisy, happy, handsome Beatles," explained the *Mirror*. "The Beatles are whacky. They wear their hair like a mop – but it's WASHED, it's super clean. So is their fresh young act."



The Beatles meet the Queen Mother following the performance that turned them into household names

Mood music: 'She Loves You', which broke all sales records in the autumn of 1963 and became the defining song of the Beatles' initial breakthrough.



The Beatles land in New York and set about transforming Britain's image in the eyes of America, 1964

4 "Yeah! Yeah! USA!" ED SULLIVAN SHOW, 9 FEBRUARY 1964

It's impossible to overstate the impact of the Beatles' arrival in New York in February 1964. Before they landed, no British group had had a serious break in the United States, and British popular culture was generally seen as stuffy and old-fashioned. By the time they left, the picture had changed forever.

The key moment was their appearance on CBS's *Ed Sullivan Show*, watched by 73 million people, then the largest audience in American television history. The next day's papers claimed that the streets of New York were deserted as people huddled in front of their television sets – even the evangelist Billy Graham broke his rule about not watching television on the Sabbath so that he could see what was getting his daughters so excited.

In the United States, Beatles merchandise was everywhere. In the aftermath of the group's triumphant appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, 100,000 Beatles dolls poured into the shops of New York, while various companies produced an estimated 35,000 Beatles wigs a day. And at home, their success was treated as a kind of national vindication after years of retreat.

"YEAH! YEAH! USA!" roared a triumphant headline in the *Mirror*. The Americans quickly adopted the now-famous term already being used in British media: Beatlemania.

Almost overnight, Britain's image had been reborn, from a tired old colonial empire to a modern, youthful, dynamic fashion capital. "If any country is in deficit with us," said the new Conservative prime minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, "I have only to say the Beatles are coming." The *New Musical Express* went on to agree: "We may be regarded as a second-class power in politics, but at any rate we now lead the world in pop music!"

Mood music: 'I Want to Hold Your Hand', the Beatles' first American number 1, which they played at the end of their appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.



5 Creative highs, financial angst

REVOLVER, 5 AUGUST 1966

The Beatles' seventh studio album, *Revolver*, marked the moment they reached artistic maturity. With its electronic experiments, psychedelic effects and intricate song lyrics, it transcended their previous material and broke new ground in demonstrating what a pop group could achieve. Even at the time, in August 1966, some listeners recognised it as a masterpiece. The jazz musician and critic George Melly wrote that the Beatles had broken "right through the conventions of the very best traditions of popular song", adding that pop had finally "come of age".

But one of *Revolver*'s less celebrated songs tells an unexpected story about Britain in the mid-1960s. The band were now enormously, colossally rich – so rich they had left their old lives far behind.

Since their breakthrough, the picture had begun to darken for Britain's economy. Many British industries were increasingly uncompetitive, losing market share to their foreign competitors. Prices were rising; so, almost unnoticed, was unemployment. And for rich men like the Beatles, there was another anxiety: tax. The top income tax rate under Harold Wilson's Labour government was 90 per cent, which explains why newspapers were already fretting about a "brain drain", as high earners moved to Australia, South Africa or the United States.

Having grown up in a Liverpool council house as the son of a bus driver and a shop assistant, George Harrison had never felt guilty about wanting to do well. Filling in a questionnaire about his ambitions before the Beatles became famous, he had written: "To retire with a lot of money, thank you." Now he poured his financial anxiety into the song 'Taxman', a howl of protest against the Inland Revenue's demands.



Mood music: With barbed lyrics such as "Should 5 per cent appear too small; Be thankful I don't take it all", 'Taxman' marked the Beatles' first venture into political protest music.

Men queue at a Hartlepool job centre. By the mid-sixties, Britain's financial boom was turning sour



Nostalgia was the zeitgeist in 1967 Britain – a fact that's reflected in the cover of the Beatles' eighth album, "a Who's Who of eminent Victorians"

6 When Victorians reigned again

SGT PEPPER, 26 MAY 1967

Britain in the 1960s was a society obsessed with its own past. Now that the British empire had faded into history, John Bull was busy reinventing himself as a joke – a kind of carnival turn – and nothing captured that better than the Beatles' eighth and most celebrated album, *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released at the end of May 1967.

For many contemporary listeners, *Sgt Pepper* was an extraordinary, even bewildering experience, with its continuous stream of sound, its studio banter, steam organs and animal noises, its combination of cartoonish psychedelia, circus vaudeville, driving rock music and gentle ballads. Perhaps the most striking thing, though, was the influence of the old-fashioned Victorian music hall, from the jaunty love song 'When I'm Sixty-Four' to the fairground sound on 'Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite' – a clear nod to the traditions with which the Beatles had grown up in northern England.

None of this was an accident. Victoriana was everywhere in the popular culture of the mid-1960s, from the art nouveau fabrics in

home-improvement magazines to the colossal popularity of *The Forsyte Saga*, which was running every week on BBC Two in the first half of 1967. Even fashion, abandoning the space-age look popular a few years earlier, was now turning nostalgic. The current vogue, declared the *Daily Sketch* that summer, was for "Indian jackets and dresses, kimonos, Victorian dresses, elaborately patterned, beaded and flowing twenties and thirties dresses, bell-bottomed trousers and brocade waistcoats".

What best captured this new aesthetic, though, was *Sgt Pepper* itself – meaning the physical artefact. Jann Haworth and Peter Blake's cover shows the Beatles as moustachioed Victorian bandsmen, surrounded by their cultural heroes, from Sir Robert Peel, Aubrey Beardsley and Edgar Allan Poe to Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde and HG Wells – a Who's Who of eminent Victorians.



Mood music: 'A Day in the Life', the high point of the Beatles' journey into psychedelic musical experimentalism.

7 The magic wand of spiritualism

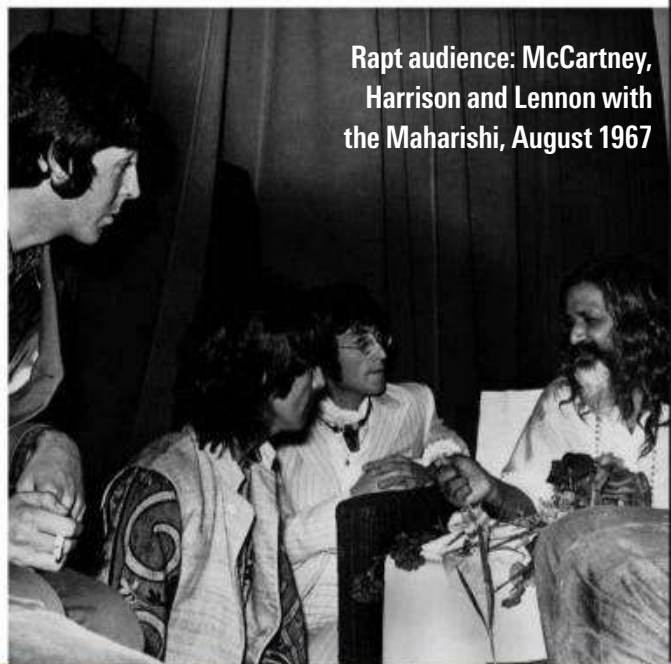
**MEETING THE MAHARISHI,
24 AUGUST 1967**

In August 1967, three of the Beatles, minus Ringo, pushed their way through the crowds into the Park Lane Hilton for a lecture. The speaker was the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a self-professed Indian holy man with a grey beard, long robes and garlands of flowers. Having studied transcendental meditation for 13 years in the Himalayas, he already had some 250 worldwide meditation centres and 10,000 British converts. None, however, were as famous as the Beatles. After the Hilton lecture, they were granted a brief audience. "You have created a magic wand in your name," he told them. "Wave it so that it will move in the proper direction."

In the press, the Beatles' flirtation with the Maharishi, which included spiritual regeneration retreats in north Wales and the foothills of the Ganges, was a sensation. In bohemian and artistic circles the east had long been seen as glamorous and mysterious. And by 1967 some British students were already embarking on the so-called "hippie trail", travelling overland through Turkey and Iran towards Afghanistan and India.

But it was the Beatles who really turned the fascination with the east into a more mainstream preoccupation. By the end of the 1960s, Buddhism, Hinduism and transcendental meditation had become immensely fashionable.

The popularity of the sitar musician Ravi Shankar owed much to his friendship with George Harrison, who had developed a love for Indian music. And in 1971 Shankar and Harrison co-organised the pioneering Concert for Bangladesh – the first major rock concert for a charitable cause.



Rapt audience: McCartney, Harrison and Lennon with the Maharishi, August 1967



Mood music: 'Norwegian Wood', the first Beatles song incorporating Indian elements, as well as the first use of the sitar in a western rock record.

Lennon and Yoko Ono in the seventies. By now, the optimism of the mid-60s had given way to anger and anxiety



8 A dream dies as recession beckons

BREAK-UP, APRIL 1970

The Beatles phenomenon was born of affluence and optimism, a product of the buoyant economic growth and booming teenage markets of the Macmillan years in the early 1960s. It was fitting, then, that the band broke up at the moment the economic and political skies were darkening, as the heady utopianism of the Swinging Sixties gave way to the anger and anxieties of the following decade.

In retrospect, the Beatles were probably doomed as early as 1968, when the four members began to quarrel about musical and business issues. Both Lennon and Harrison were keen to try new individual ventures and by early 1969 the former's new wife, Yoko Ono, was proving to be a destabilising influence. By that autumn, the band was effectively dead. But it was not until the following April, when Paul McCartney issued a statement that he had no plans to work with the Beatles again, that they formally broke up.

Today it's often said that the dissolution of the Beatles was

the moment the sixties ended. Certainly, as the seventies dawned, their sound – daring, confident, youthful, experimental – appeared the product of a bygone era. Within just a few years, economic growth would come grinding to a halt, with the OPEC oil shock pushing the western world into recession. And in Edward Heath's Britain, public life took on a harsher edge, typified by strikes, inflation, terrorist atrocities and political breakdown.

So if the Beatles had stayed together, perhaps they would have struggled to find a place in the uneasy world of the 1970s. Theirs was the music of youth and hope, a reminder of a vanished age of utopian idealism. And so, by and large, it remains today. **H**

.....
Dominic Sandbrook's books include *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (Abacus, 2009)

WATCH **Get Back**, Peter Jackson's three-part series on the making of the Beatles' album *Let it Be*, begins on Disney+ on 25 November

LISTEN To listen to a BBC World Service **Witness** documentary on the Beatles' last live performance, go to bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3cswsm5



Mood music: 'Let it Be', the last single before McCartney announced the end of the Beatles: a suitably poignant ballad in memory of his mother.

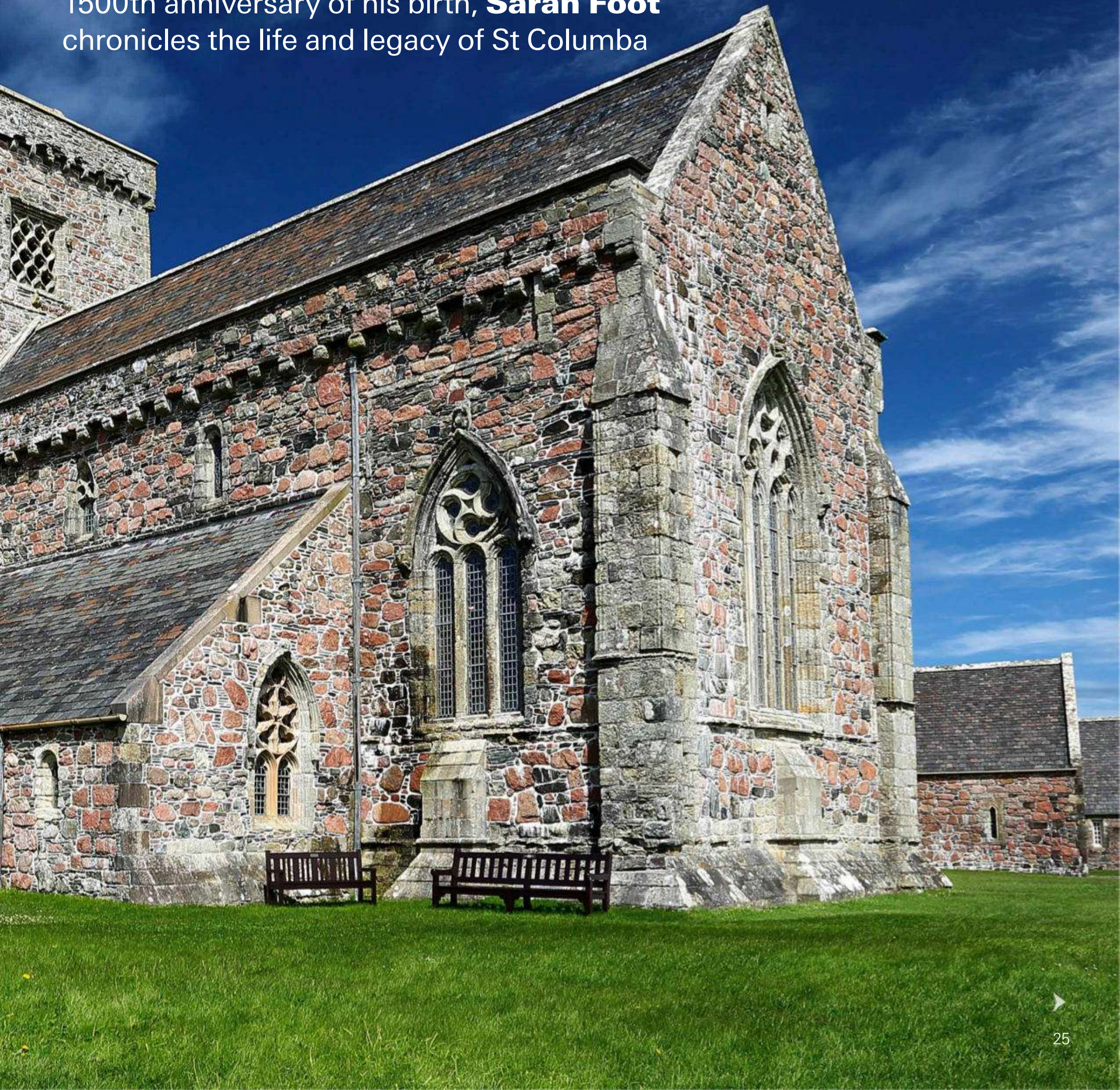


House of the holy
Columba depicted on a wall hanging in
Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral.
This Irish patron saint founded the
abbey on Iona, Scotland (pictured)
— but his influence on the
Christian church was, and still
is, felt much further afield

ALAMY/DREAMSTIME

The miraculous St Columba

In the sixth century, an Irish holy man set foot on a tiny Scottish isle and changed the course of Christianity. On the 1500th anniversary of his birth, **Sarah Foot** chronicles the life and legacy of St Columba



Fifteen hundred years ago, a young woman in north-west Ireland had a vision. An angel of God appeared before her and prophesied that the infant in her womb would grow into “a son of such flower that he shall be reckoned as one of the prophets. He is destined by God to lead innumerable souls to the heavenly kingdom.” Throughout 2021, we have been commemorating the anniversary of the birth of that child: St Columba.

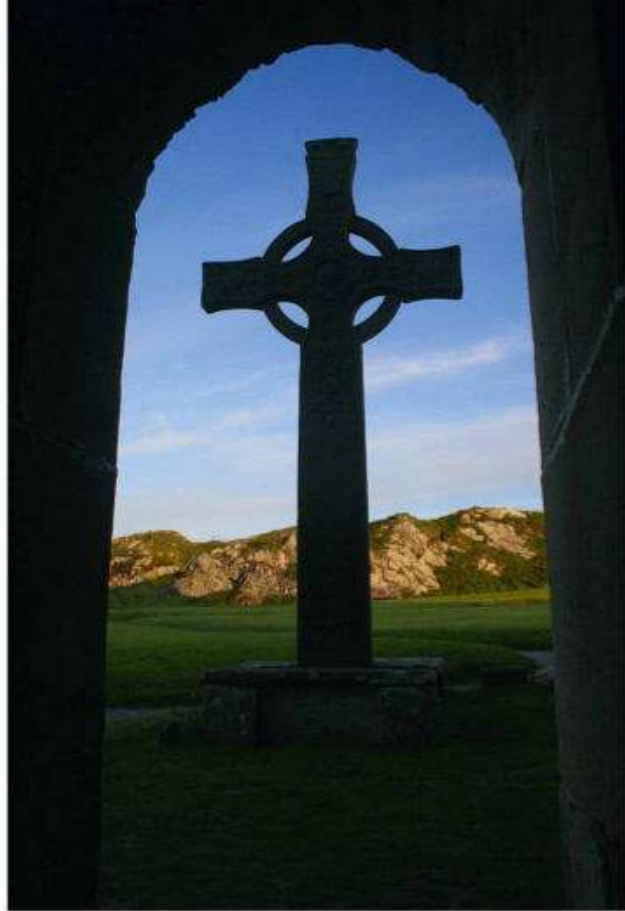
That Columba was a titan of the early Irish and British church is beyond argument. Medieval Scots hailed him as “*spes Scotorum*” – “hope of Scots”. The Irish were so in awe of him that they made him one of their three patron saints. Powerful English kings sought spiritual support from his immediate successors. Columba is remembered as a missionary, miracle-worker, king-maker and, above all, as the founder of an enormously influential monastery on Iona.

The religious community that he forged on this western Scottish isle helped make him one of the most powerful religious figures in sixth-century Scotland and Ireland. Yet today his reputation endures far beyond the confines of north-western Europe. Over the past 15 centuries, Columba has been celebrated in poetry and prose, in manuscript art, sculpture and folkloric tales everywhere from Scandinavia to the United States. Churches throughout the Christian world claim him as their patron saint. When pilgrims descend upon Iona to pray and pay homage to his remarkable life and legacy, they do so from destinations across the globe.

But why? What is it about this holy man from early medieval times – whose historical feats are shrouded in a fog of fantasy and conjecture – that resonates with so many people from so many backgrounds, and so long after his death?

The answer lies, in part, in the figure of a chronicler who never met Columba, but who followed in his footsteps. In AD 697, Adomnán, the ninth abbot of Iona, was asked by his monks to write a *Life of Columba* to mark the centenary of his death. It was a challenge that he clearly enjoyed. In Adomnán’s hands, the austere saint was transformed into a miracle-worker who conversed with angels regularly, spread Christianity among the pagan Picts, and engaged in spiritual battle with their druids.

Adomnán drew on three sources when compiling his *Life of Columba*: on his own experience of the saint’s miracles, on personal testimony from reliable witnesses, and on written accounts



Sign of the cross

The replica of the ancient St John’s Cross, which stands outside the entrance of St Columba’s Shrine at Iona. Columba founded the abbey on the island off Scotland’s west coast in AD 563, and he was buried there in AD 597

compiled by his predecessors, the abbots Ségéne (died AD 652) and Cumméne (died 669). The result was an unashamedly flattering account of Columba’s life, one that would ensure that his reputation would take flight and eclipse all other holy men of his age.

The “dove of the church”

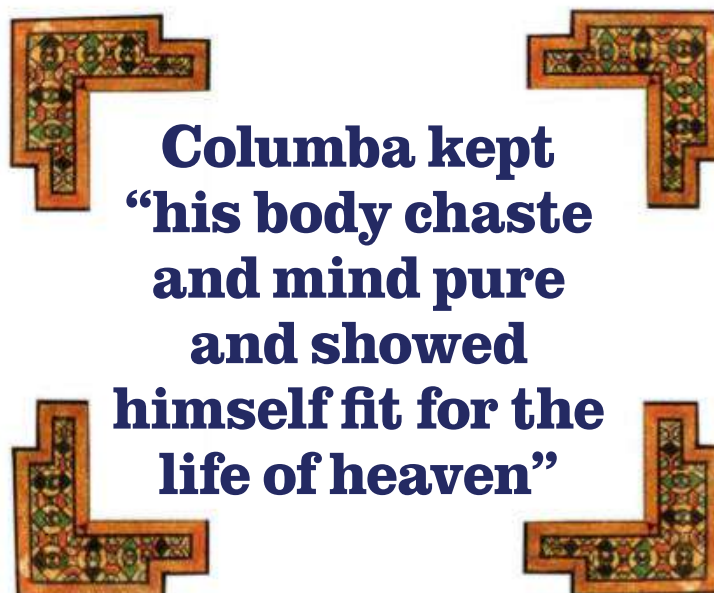
The life that Adomnán describes is traditionally believed to have begun on 7 December AD 521. (However December 520 has also been advanced as a possible birth date and it is for this reason that celebrations in Ireland have run across the year, from December 2020 to December 2021.) Adomnán tells us that Eithne, the young noblewoman who received the aforementioned vision from an angel of God, did, as predicted, give birth to a son – in a location traditionally identified as Gartán in County Donegal. Eithne and her husband, Fedelmid, son of Fergus (who was also of noble stock), named their child Colum Cille, meaning “the dove of the church”. In Latin, his name was Columba.

Columba’s parents were probably Christian and may have raised their son for a life in the church, giving him up to be educated by a foster father, a priest called Cruithnechán. According to Adomnán, the young Columba kept “his body chaste and mind pure and showed himself, though placed on Earth, fit for the life of heaven”.

Our sources are mostly silent about his activities after his ordination to the priesthood, but he seems to have founded several monasteries in his native Ireland, including one at Derry, on the banks of the river Foyle, and perhaps the great religious house in Kells in north-eastern Ireland.

The defining moment of Columba’s career came in AD 563, when he was 41. He had left Ireland in the aftermath of the battle of Cúl Drebene, which, according to one version of events, came about when a disagreement over Columba copying a manuscript escalated into a clan war. Columba sailed to Britain, having chosen “to be a pilgrim for Christ”, and he spent the rest of his life there working as an “island soldier”, always engaged in praying, reading, writing, or some other task.

Exactly why Columba chose to leave Ireland is uncertain. Adomnán’s account of the battle of Cúl Drebene, and his description of Columba being (wrongly) excommunicated at an Irish synod, has led to speculation that this exile might not have been entirely voluntary. Others have posited that the move may have had a political motive, such as formalising an alliance between two rulers: Columba’s cousin, overking of the powerful Irish dynasty the Uí Néill; and his new patron, the ruler of



**Columba kept
“his body chaste
and mind pure
and showed
himself fit for the
life of heaven”**

Dál Riata (the kingdom that straddled western Scotland and the north-east corner of Ireland).

Whatever his motives for crossing the Irish Sea, Columba went first to the stronghold of the Scots king, Conall mac Comgaill, at Dunadd. And it was from Conall – Adomnán and the early Irish annals report – that Columba was bequeathed Iona. The Venerable Bede (writing in AD 731) offers a different interpretation of how the saint came to inherit Iona, declaring that he had “come from Ireland to Britain to preach the word of God in the provinces of the northern Picts”, and that the Pictish king had given Iona to the saint after his conversion. It would, no doubt, have been in Pictish interests to promulgate this latter version, but the former appears more plausible.

The inhabitants of the community that Columba established in Iona built a church and the dwellings they needed for the monastic life within an enclosure on the empty island. But this was never a monastery cut off from the outside world. Adomnán describes a steady stream of monks, pilgrims, penitents and other visitors at the abbey, all seeking Columba’s spiritual teaching. Once, so Adomnán tells us, an exhausted heron, blown off course, landed on Iona and was treated as a pilgrim until it recovered its strength sufficiently to return to Ireland. So busy was the monastery that Columba often had to withdraw to a wilder part of the island to find a place to pray alone.

Source of inspiration

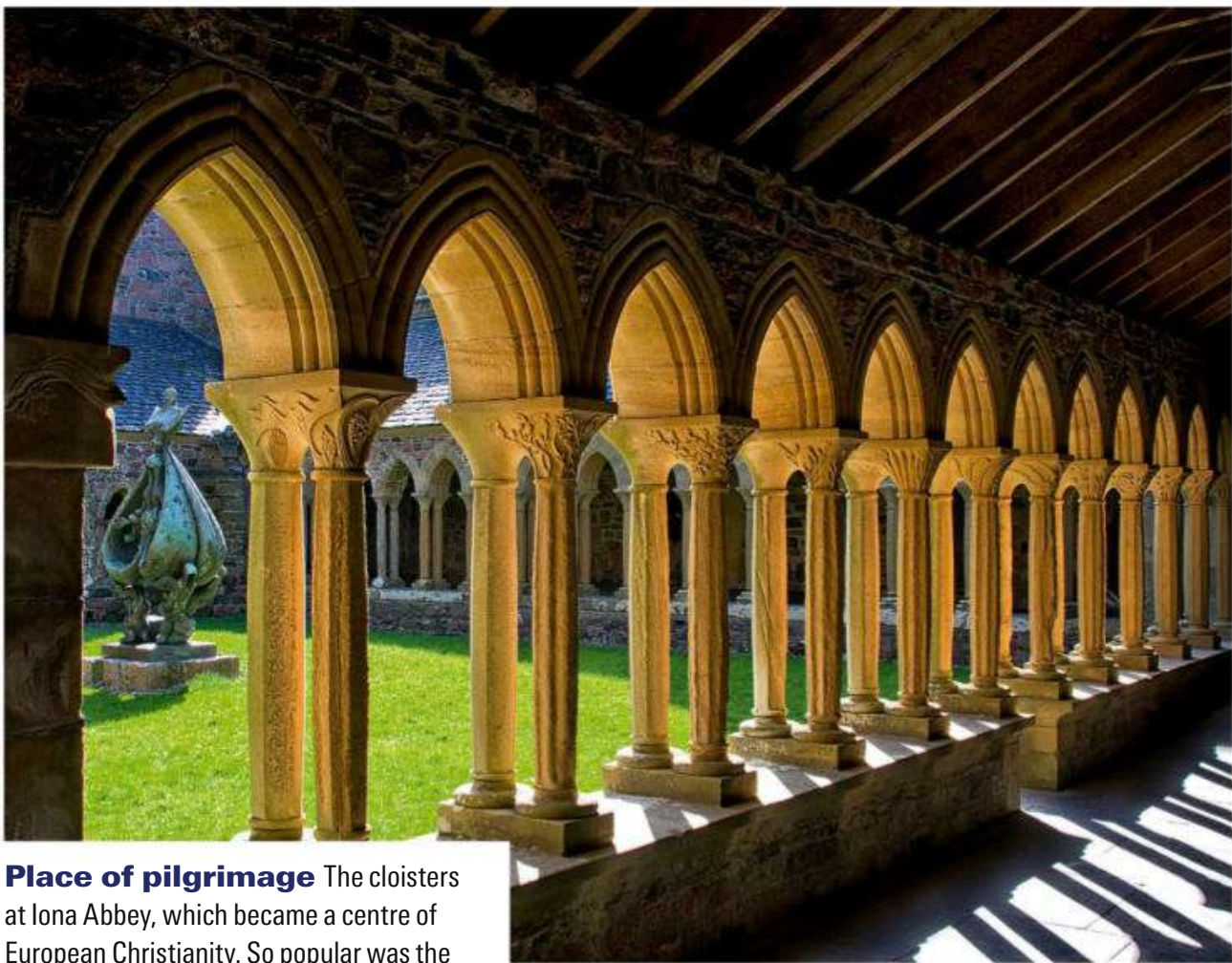
Such was the lure of this ecclesiastical outpost that it soon inspired others on the surrounding islands and the mainland of Dál Riata, each modelled on the Ionan way of life. Some were governed by Columba’s relatives – for example his uncle Ernán became prior of the monastery on Hinba (a Scottish island of uncertain location). But Iona retained primacy over all its dependent churches in Scotland and Ireland, and, later, among the English.

As Iona’s influence expanded, so did the range of Columba’s travels. He sailed from island to island, visited communities the length and breadth of mainland Dál Riata and even crossed the Druim Alban (the central Scottish mountain chain) to be among the Picts.

Wherever Columba went, he shared his mystical insights and spiritual visions, introduced the good news of the gospel to pagans and offered pastoral counselling. According to Adomnán, he performed miracles too: healing the sick; killing a boar of amazing size merely by commanding it to “die where you are”; drawing water from a stone to baptise an infant; and tussling



Ancient abbey, new look The graveyard on Iona with the abbey buildings behind, which were extensively restored in the 20th century. The Columban abbey was attacked and burned in Viking raids in the late eighth and ninth centuries, leading the monks to relocate to Kells, Ireland, taking the relics of Columba with them

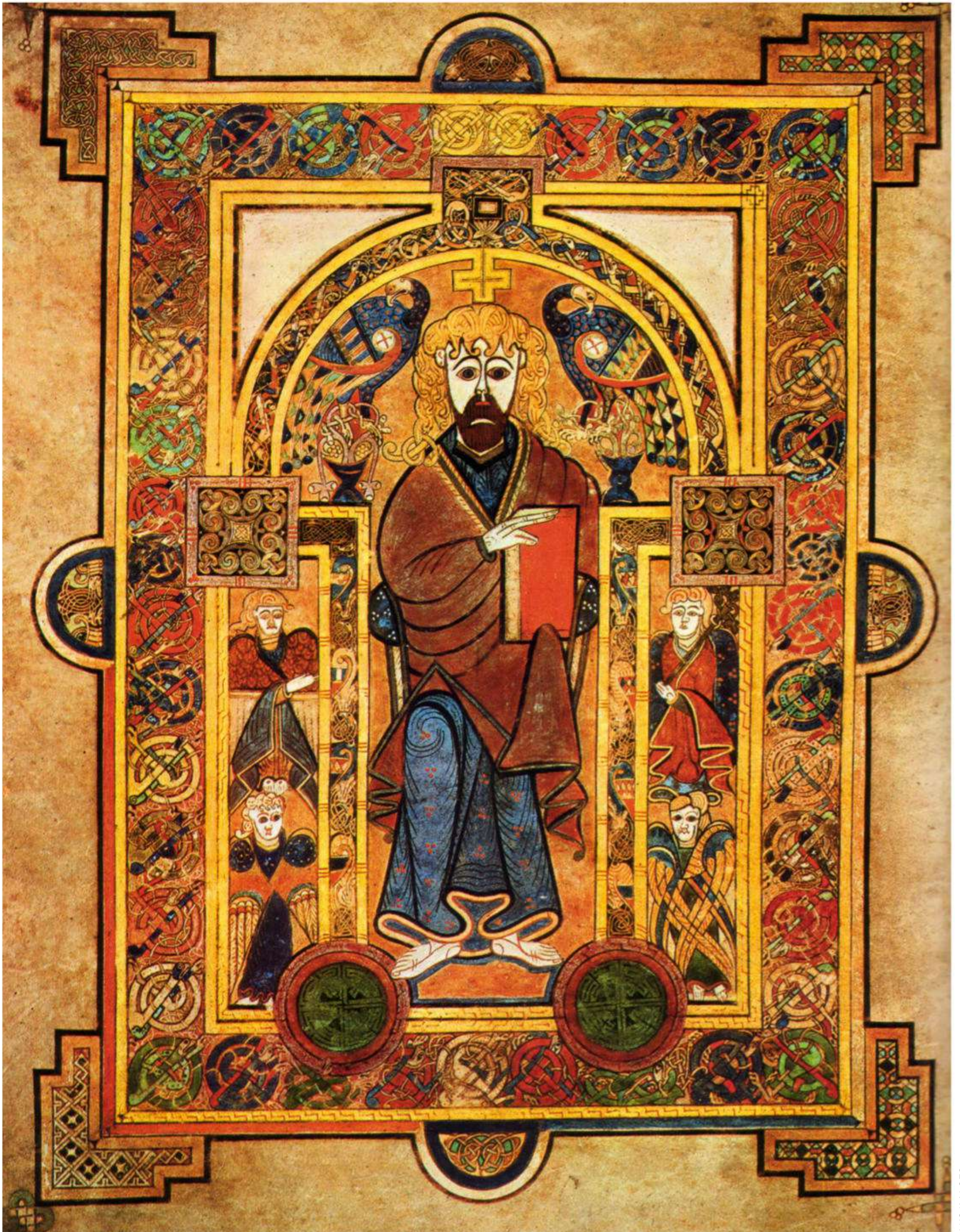


Place of pilgrimage The cloisters at Iona Abbey, which became a centre of European Christianity. So popular was the abbey in Columba’s day that he was forced to withdraw to a wilder part of the island to pray

successfully with pagan wizards. Once, the saint was accompanied by a bright column of fiery light – like the pillar of fire that preceded the Israelites in the Book of Exodus – and, if that wasn’t protection enough, he could call upon the support of holy angels.

Yet this miracle-worker was a man of contradictions, writes Adomnán. A tall figure

of powerful build and considerable presence, Columba was quick to anger, leading to his reputation in Irish legend as the bad-tempered saint. But he showed compassion to penitents, cared for his monks, and would relax his strict fast to entertain visitors to Iona. These contradictions in his character are conveyed by the contrast between his



The most impressive tribute A full-page illumination of Christ enthroned from the *Book of Kells*, a spectacular manuscript containing the four Gospels of the New Testament. Originally thought to have been created during the time of Columba, it has now been dated to c800 AD as the masterpiece of Columban monks

Latin name (“the dove”) and his Gaelic nickname, Crimthann (“the fox”).

Whether fox or dove, by the second half of the sixth century, Columba’s status as a pre-eminent holy man, scholar and monastic leader had made him a political and religious heavyweight – someone who could shape the destinies of rulers across Scotland and Ireland. In his relationship with kings, Columba appeared in Adomnán’s account like the biblical prophet Samuel in the way that he interceded with the Almighty: “Some kings were conquered in the terrifying crash of battle and others emerged victorious according to what Columba asked of God by the power of prayer. He remained a triumphant champion of kings in death as in life.”

Columba gave support to rulers of Ireland’s powerful Uí Néill dynasty and other lesser rulers in Ireland, and to the Dál Riata and neighbouring Strathclyde in Scotland. He made at least one visit to Bridei, the king of the Picts, and preached among that people with the aid of an interpreter. Although Bede exaggerated his role as missionary to the Picts, the saint undoubtedly paved the way for later missions.

Converting the pagans

Adomnán claimed that Columba ordained Áedán mac Gabrán as king of Dál Riata in c574 AD. This may be a little fanciful, but it’s plausible that the new king sought the blessing of this holy man at the start of his reign. In fact, such was Columba’s status, he was able to influence events beyond the grave and across the border into England. After his death, we’re told, the saint appeared in a vision to the powerful Anglo-Saxon king Oswald of Northumbria, promising him victory in battle and successful rule over his people. Once Oswald had achieved these objectives, he turned to Iona for monks to convert his pagan people, and gave the island of Lindisfarne to the Irish monk Aidan so that he could establish a monastery there in AD 635.

By then, Columba was long dead, breathing his last on Iona on 9 June AD 597, aged around 75. He collapsed part way through copying a psalter (a book containing the Psalms) and died in the church in the company of his monks. He was buried in a simple grave on Iona, marked by the stone that he had used as a pillow.

Of course, that was far from the end of the story. Fanned by Adomnán’s writings, Columba’s status soared further still. The Northumbrians cultivated his memory, while the Irish honoured him as a poet as well as a spiritual leader. And, in what is arguably the most impressive of all tributes, the “great

HOW COLUMBA TAMED THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

The Scottish beast was no match for the Irish saint

If Columba’s seventh-century biographer Adomnán is to be believed, the saint was a prolific worker of miracles, raising the dead, calming wind and storm, and using a white stone from a riverbed to effect incredible cures. In terms of sheer drama, few of the miraculous feats credited to him can match his encounter with the Loch Ness monster.

One day, Adomnán wrote, while Columba was among the Picts, he had to cross the river Ness. As he arrived at the bank, he saw some locals burying a man who had been mauled in the water by a great beast. Immediately Columba ordered one of his companions to swim across the river and bring back a dingy from the opposite bank.

The young man, Luigne moccu Min, obediently stripped off his tunic and dived into the water; as he swam in the middle of the stream, the beast came to the surface and rushed, open mouthed, towards him. Everyone was terrified, apart from the saint, who calmly raised his hand. Making the sign of the cross and invoking the Almighty, he commanded the beast: “Go no further, do not touch the man. Go back at once.”

At the sound of Columba’s voice, the beast fled so fast that the bystanders thought he was being pulled back by ropes.

Luigne returned with the dingy unscathed, and everyone rejoiced. As Adomnán reports: “Even the heathen natives who were present at the time were so moved by the greatness of the miracle they had witnessed that they too magnified the God of the Christians.”

Many scholars have dismissed this story as pure make-believe. Others have speculated that it was inspired by the sighting of a walrus or similarly unfamiliar sea creature far up-river. Whatever the truth, Columba’s taming of the Loch Ness monster is an intriguing addition to Scotland’s enduring legend.

Shepherd of Nessie

A stained glass window of a hooded St Columba, with a shepherd’s crook, in the chapel at Edinburgh Castle



Columba’s status was such that Robert the Bruce paraded his relics before his army at Bannockburn

gospel of Colum Cille” – better known as the *Book of Kells* – was created c800 AD, perhaps in Iona or Kells, possibly to mark the bicentenary of the saint’s death.

By the time Robert the Bruce paraded the saint’s relics before his army at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, Columba’s lofty position in the popular imagination was secure. In the 1930s, a Church of Scotland minister, George MacLeod, founded the modern ecumenical community of Iona, so lending Columba’s legend fresh currency.

Fifteen hundred years after his birth, Columba remains one of Ireland’s best-known and best-loved sons, but he belongs to the whole world. **H**

Sarah Foot is Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford

LISTEN

To listen to the BBC World Service **Heart and Soul** documentary on Iona, go to bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p01ksh7v



The roasts of Christmas

The British Christmas dinner is the stuff of legends, from succulent roast turkey to the often maligned Brussels sprout. But the modern meal was a long time in the making. **Annie Gray** investigates the foods our ancestors ate in Christmases past, from the delicious to the downright disgusting



LATE MEDIEVAL / TUDOR

Gluttons, devils and wine-bibbers

Winter is grim, and for the medieval church Advent was a period of religious fast. During this time people couldn't eat dairy, eggs or animal products, although fish was permissible. So the chance to light big fires, drink and eat was a release of tension and an officially sanctioned period in which to blow off steam. For those who could afford it, Christmas extended over the full Twelve Days, each with feasting and play.

Up to the 16th century there were no foods entirely specific to Christmas, but there were dishes connected to celebration and showing off. By the end of the 16th century, some of these were more associated with Christmas than others. Big birds were "in" because farmed fowl was in season – thus goose, capon, swan (raised from that year's cygnets) and peacock were all consumed. When turkey was introduced from the Americas in around the 1530s it was enthusiastically adopted, served roasted with head and legs intact, or with elements of the plumage used as decoration for raised pies.

For those who could not afford such lavishness, hospitality was taken seriously. Landlords and employers gave gifts of meat, fuel and ale to the poor.

Mentions of specific Christmas pies appear during the Tudor period, too. These were sometimes the

meat-heavy equivalents of today's multi-bird roasts, but it was also a name for mince pies, made with up to 50 per cent meat, bulked out with sugar, spice and all things very nice – and very rich. Plum pottage was another seasonal food (like mince pies, eaten throughout winter), consisting of a hefty beef stock, breadcrumbs, spice and dried fruit.

And then there was the booze. Excess drinking was very much a part of the season. So much so that by the 17th century the Puritan writer William Prynne said that, based on Christmas revelry, Jesus might be thought of as "a glutton, an epicure, a wine-bibber, a devil".



Birds such as goose, swan and peacock were often on the late medieval festive menu

In the 16th and 17th centuries alcohol was integral to Christmas, as the Twelve Days were seen as a time to over-indulge in drink

BRIDGEMAN/LAMY



The chance to light big fires, drink and eat was a much-needed release of tension

GEORGIAN

Four couples in states of undress under the mistletoe, in Thomas Rowlandson's 1812 etching. Some saw Christmas as the season of revelry, but the elites looked down on extended frivolity



The end of excess?

“Old Christmas is coming,” cried Charles Lamb in 1826. “He cometh not with his wonted gait, he is shrunk 9 inches in the girth, but is yet a Lusty fellow.” By the late 18th century Christmas was a slippery thing. For enthusiasts such as Lamb, it was a season of celebration, a chance to get very drunk and party. After all, it was only a few generations ago that parliament had tried and failed to reduce the whole thing to the status of any other Sunday. But for the Georgian fashionable elites, the Puritans had had something of a point. All that riotous celebration and forced jollity seemed to them a tad plebian.

By the early 19th century the Twelve Days had dwindled to one, sometimes two, days of excess. All that feasting was now concentrated into one meal, Christmas dinner, held generally around 5pm on the 25th (later for the very fashionable). At its core were the two edible emblems of England, trotted out for any celebratory feast and deeply patriotic.

Roast beef and plum pudding appeared as

part of the upper-class three-course *à la Française* (where every dish is served at the same time) meal. The beef was roasted in front of a roaring fire, while the pudding was a cousin of plum pottage, sharing with it the dried fruit and spice, but now mixed with suet and flour and boiled in a cloth to form a cannon-ball shaped pudding. The two were consumed as complementary flavours and surrounded with a choice of other dishes, including unseasonal vegetables and a lot of game. Both were a demonstration of wealth.

Other specifically Christmassy foods included mince pies, served, again, as part of the main meal; turkey and other farmed birds; and Twelfth Cake. This last was, as the name suggests, eaten on Twelfth Night. It was a rich fruit cake, iced and decorated in often lurid forms. In the early Georgian period a bean would be concealed within, the finder becoming king for the night. By the 1780s, the beans had been replaced with revellers buying packs of character cards. They were available at all price points and very popular.

VICTORIAN



The poor joined goose clubs, saving all year for their coveted Christmas bird

Four pigs carry Christmas dishes in this c1880 image. The Victorians paved the way for many of our 21st-century Christmas celebrations

Cooking up the modern Christmas



Christmas dishes from one of Mrs Beeton's cookery books, 1890. By the 1860s turkey featured on many British festive menus

The Victorians have the reputation for creating the modern Christmas. This is largely true, and Christmas became both more family-friendly and more commercialised in the almost 64 years Victoria was on the throne. It is to the Victorians that we owe the rebranding of Twelfth Cake to Christmas cake, and plum pudding to Christmas pudding. The decoupling of the pudding from roast beef, as well as its placing toward the end of the meal, would have been unthinkable in 1837, but was largely complete by 1901.

For the rich, beef remained a huge part of the Christmas spread, along with roast game. Meat in general was prestigious. The poor joined goose clubs, saving all year for their Christmas goose. In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit's bird would have come from such a source. Stuffed and roasted in front of a fire, the normal accompaniments were potatoes and Brussels sprouts, the first printed recipes for which appeared in the 1840s. The wealthy still favoured unseasonal produce, including asparagus. Jerusalem artichoke soup also enjoyed a brief

vogue as a Christmas(ish) starter.

Service style was changing too, from the simultaneous serving of many dishes at once that the Georgians had favoured to the new, sequential style known as *à la Russe*. But it was slow to catch on, especially at Christmas, for the lure of a groaning table was hard to resist (and *à la Russe* was ridiculously complicated and expensive for the vast majority of people, as it required many servants.)

Queen Victoria adopted the new style in the 1870s. Her Christmas dinners were remarkably consistent. Roast beef, woodcock pie, a raised game pie, a stuffed boar's head and a huge brawn (a vertical slice of pig, rolled and poached) appeared every year on the sideboard. The main meal included sprouts, game and mince pies, now with very little meat.

Another common dish on upper-class tables was boiled turkey. In 1861 journalist and cookery book writer Isabella Beeton wrote: "Christmas dinner, with the middle classes of this empire, would scarcely be a Christmas dinner without its turkey." However, it was still far from the majority choice.



A butcher displays Christmas turkeys and encourages shoppers to register so they can buy a bird, 1946. Rationing and shortages made procuring meat difficult

Mock meals and chronic shortages

In many ways it was the stresses of life in wartime, and the 14 years of rationing that accompanied it, that cemented the Christmas menu in England. (Irish Christmases remained more beef-based and the Welsh favoured goose, while in Scotland Hogmanay was more important.) Because so many foods that had come to symbolise Christmas were unobtainable during the war, when they returned it was to jubilation. Meals also became smaller in the 1950s, while some traditional dishes fell away. Of course, the meals people ate were still varied, but the ideal Christmas menus printed in books and newspapers became increasingly rigid.

In 1939 Christmas was not unduly challenging, but with 1940 came rationing. Although the ration would fluctuate, for most of the next decade – and beyond – there tended to be very limited fat, sugar, eggs and meat. Even those things that remained unrationed (or, later, were restricted by a points system), such as dried fruit, were scarce. But Christmas was incredibly important for morale, and at a time when diaries and letters are full

of food – getting it, longing for it, lacking it – dinner remained a focus. Writers and broadcasters rushed to suggest ways to get by, from custard powder in lieu of eggs (nasty), to dried eggs (nastier), to a wide and rather optimistic range of “mock” dishes. Mock meats were based on potato and sausagemeat, and mock marzipan on dried beans. The Ministry of Food remained upbeat, declaring that fruit bowls were easily replaced with vegetables: “The cheerful glow of carrots, the rich crimson of beetroot, the emerald of parsley – it looks as

delightful as it tastes.”

Christmas dinners inclined toward meat and lots of veg. Those who had space kept rabbits or chickens, to be sacrificed for the festive table. Dig for Victory was in full swing, and potatoes, carrots and other easily grown specimens were ubiquitous. Restaurants also remained open, albeit restricted, and boomed. The rich, as ever, fared better – the Savoy and other such hotels sourced game and salmon from their clients and raided their well-stocked larders. But even there, the Christmas puddings were more carrot than fruit, and custard came from a tin.

Food swaps included custard powder in lieu of eggs and mock marzipan made from dried beans



A girl holding allotment-grown potatoes, 1941. Dig for Victory was in full swing, so home-grown vegetables were a staple of Christmas meals

21ST CENTURY



Although the modern Christmas dinner is expected to feature turkey and Brussels sprouts, these foods aren't on every table. Only 70 per cent of Britons eat turkey, for instance

Out with the new, in with the old

If you read the papers in December, you might be forgiven for thinking that the British Christmas meal is utterly uniform: turkey, roast potatoes and sprouts, with Christmas pudding to follow, plus mince pies and Christmas cake. But only around 70 per cent of us eat turkey, even fewer opt for sprouts, and Christmas pudding is in decline.

However, for many of us, today's typical Christmas meal is almost identical to menus from the 1930s, 1950s and 1970s. And in the idealised presentation with all of the main course dishes served on the table at once, it isn't that far removed from the dinners of 250 years ago.

2020 was challenging, and 2021 may be the year of either sudden shortages or panic-bought pastry. Will this provoke greater change?

These aren't the only issues facing the Christmas dinner in the 21st century. The average meal is around 5,000 calories

and meat-heavy: reflective of earlier, more physical eras when such feasts were much anticipated one-offs. And it requires a huge amount of work (often still reliant on female labour), for when it came together, from around 1870 to 1940, in middle-class homes, servants – even if only a daily char – were still the aspiration, if not the norm.

A trot through Christmas dinners in the past shows that our apparently traditional meal is anything but. Whether rich or poor, we've eaten a vast range of

foods at Christmas in previous centuries, and although that range has narrowed in the last 200 years, the emphasis on certain staples is more in the mind than on the table. The ideal 21st-century Christmas dinner is old-fashioned, partly as it is a time of huge nostalgia and memory-making, and partly precisely because we only eat it once a year.

It doesn't have to be this way though. If we truly embrace the past, our repertoire would expand immensely. So try the raised pies, hearty stews, glazed vegetables and rich ice creams. For if we really liked turkey and trimmings, surely we'd eat it more than once a year? **H**

The average meal is around 5,000 calories, reflective of earlier eras when such grand feasts were one-offs

A dining table set with traditional Elizabethan foods. "Try the raised pies, hearty stews, glazed vegetables and rich ice creams," Annie Gray urges



Dr Annie Gray is the resident food historian on BBC Radio 4's *The Kitchen Cabinet*. Her latest book is *At Christmas We Feast: Festive Food Through the Ages*, published by Profile and available now



MORE FROM US

Annie Gray is appearing on a four-part HistoryExtra podcast series on **Christmas feasts** through the ages, running through December. [historyextra.com/podcast](https://www.historyextra.com/podcast)

» To learn how to whip up a festive mincemeat omelette, turn to page 84

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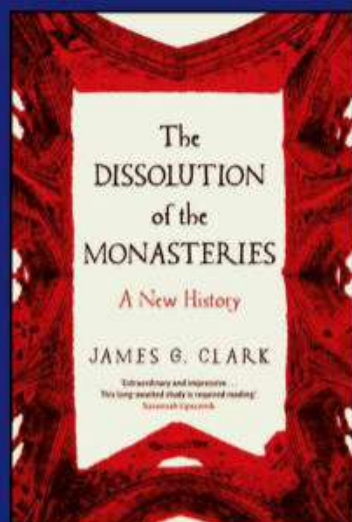
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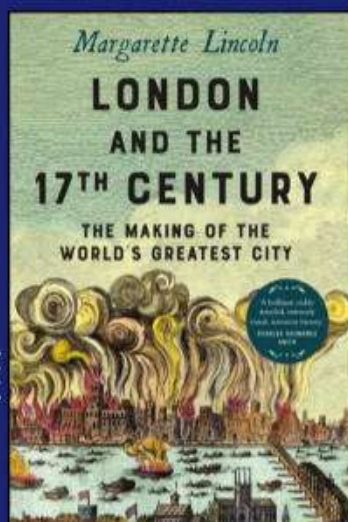
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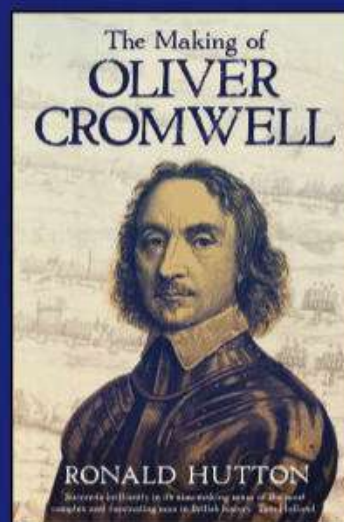
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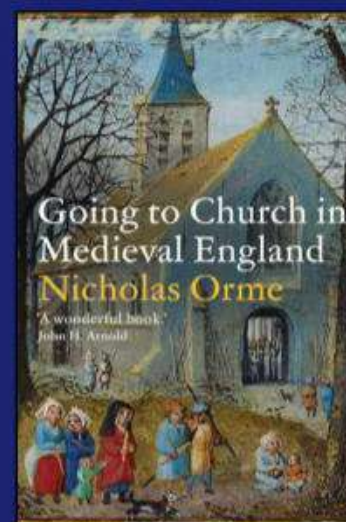
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Sex, lies and arias

Prima donnas were the A-listers of Georgian London, lionised for their heavenly voices.

But, writes **Brianna Robertson-Kirkland**, in a society that cherished quiet female domesticity, they paid a high price for their fame



Vocal discord

This print from 1807 shows John Bull sat between the rival singers Elizabeth Billington (left) and Angelica Catalani, who sing lines adapted from *The Beggar's Opera*. Spats between competing prima donnas mesmerised gossip-hungry Georgian London

turn your Eyes
hear me
if your Polly dies
hear me.

Owe my pretty Tussy
or tender sigh,
Signora Tussy
my Ear and pleas'd my Eye

If a Woman should pout
(As she will there's no doubt)
Tho her rivals as meek as a Lamb
Her Vapours to still
In lieu of a Pill
The quieting draught is a dram.





On 14 January 1792, James Ridgway did something that set Georgian London's gossip-mongers into overdrive: he published the *Memoirs of Mrs Billington*.

This account of one of the darlings of the 18th-century stage – the prima donna Elizabeth Billington – was so shocking, so salacious that, according to composer Joseph Haydn, it had sold out by 3pm that same day. Yet this was a publishing sensation with a difference.

Prima donnas were the leading female singers in Europe's operatic productions – and Billington was among the most popular. But, as it turned out, she hadn't actually written her own memoirs – Ridgway had done that. That didn't stop advertisements declaring that Ridgway's publication would include revelatory letters written by "that lady to her late mother, Mrs Weichsel", who was also a famous singer.

Ridgway argued that, by releasing the *Memoirs*, he was revealing Billington's true character, stating: "Vice, ugly vice, in all its deformities, is too often countenanced upon the stage; and it is a lamentable reflection, that in the following publication – not one chapter, can equitably be allotted, to poor neglected VIRTUE!" In other words, *The Memoirs of Mrs Billington* were something of a character assassination.

The *Memoirs* claimed that not only had Billington engaged in multiple affairs, she had even had incestuous relations with her brother, the violinist Charles Weichsel, and her father, Carl Weichsel, who was an oboist and clarinetist at the King's Theatre and Covent Garden.

And yet, there was no mention of incest in the letters published as part of the *Memoirs*. The missives mainly discussed the plights of pregnancy, homesickness and complaints about James Billington, Elizabeth's husband.

Apparently, the content of the most damning letters was so outrageous that Ridgway could not publish them. So, instead, he printed a 40-page summary of Billington's exploits, taking care to point out that all female singers in the public eye were every bit as disreputable.

In publishing his exposé, Ridgway may have claimed that he had the public's best interest in mind. However, in reality the *Memoirs* were the 18th-century equivalent of a modern gossip magazine, feeding readers' desire to know more about prima donnas – and that "more", of course, included the sordid details of their personal lives.

In 18th-century London, opera was the

While audiences flocked to see prima donnas perform, these women were also scrutinised, satirised and sexualised

most popular form of entertainment, and opera singers were the A-listers of the Georgian era. Unfortunately, the cost of celebrity was high and while audiences flocked to see the prima donnas perform, these women were also scrutinised, satirised and sexualised in the most public of settings.

Exceptional talents

Prima donna literally means "first woman". Initially, the term was purely descriptive, indicating that she (along with the leading man) earned the most stage time and performed the most dazzling arias.

Plenty of female singers aspired to become a prima donna, but this was no easy feat. Prima donnas displayed exceptional vocal talent and a sound understanding of music. However, they had fewer musical training opportunities than their male counterparts. Even the *Ospedali*, a collection of four charitable institutions in Venice, famously known for training female musicians, did not produce many prima donnas because society did not expect women to become professional musicians. Instead, they were destined for marriage, a convent, or to remain with the *Ospedali* as a teacher.

Some of the most celebrated prima donnas were themselves the daughters of musicians, and that meant that their musical education was, in effect, an induction into the family trade. Musicians' children frequently performed in public from a young age – with some, including Elizabeth Billington, billed as musical prodigies.

Belonging to a family of musicians gave aspiring prima donnas more opportunities to build a successful career, simply because they had a ready-made network of professional connections. However, they still needed to earn their place. In 1775, German soprano Caterina Schindlerin lost her position as prima donna at London's King's Theatre after one season because she failed to excite audiences. Critics labelled her acting, singing style – and even her demeanour – unappealing. The contemporary music historian Charles Burney went as far as to call her "silly and insipid".

One way in which prima donnas could excite audiences was to become embroiled in spats with their fellow performers. The rivalry between George Frideric Handel's two prima donnas, Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni (both shown below), thrilled Londoners throughout the 1726–27 season, culminating in a physical fight during a performance of Giovanni Bononcini's *Astianatte*. While this case of bad blood may have been manufactured in order to drive up attendances (it wasn't long before the pair were performing together again), episodes like this came at a cost: prima donnas earned the reputation as jealous, entitled narcissists, who would do anything for attention.

In truth, however, prima donnas attracted attention whether they sought it or not – especially if the London press got whiff of an alleged affair. In 1728 it was reported that English singer Lavinia Fenton, who famously performed the role of Polly in the popular

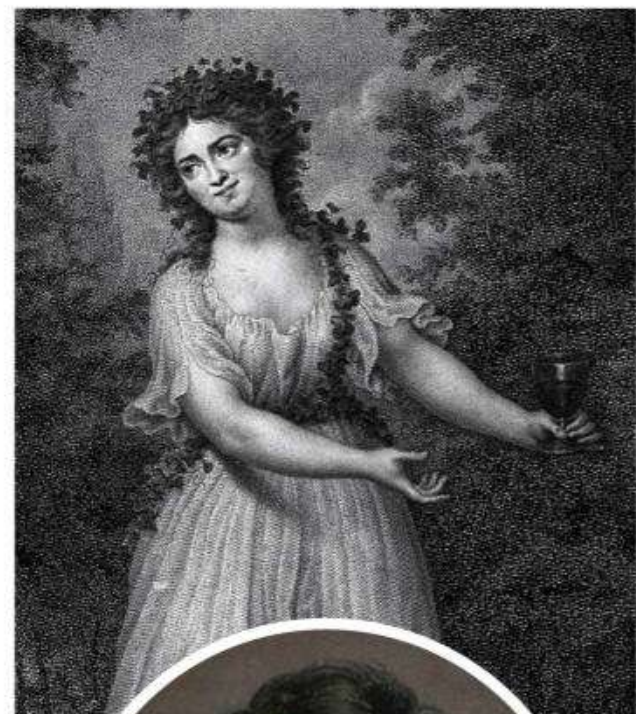
Trading blows

Prima donnas Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni had a fight on stage in 1727. But was their rivalry a genuine one?





Out of favour
After escaping an abusive marriage, Gertrud Mara had an affair with the flautist Charles Florio, much to the disgust (according to the moralising *Morning Post*) of Scottish opera-goers



Royal defence
Anna Selina Storace shown playing Euphrosyne in Milton's *Comus*. Storace's husband, John Abraham Fisher, beat her so badly that Emperor Joseph II had him banished from Venice

Marked man
The singer John Braham. His 20-year relationship with Anna Selina Storace sparked a press feeding frenzy, triggered by his Jewish background, and the fact that she was nine years his senior

ballad opera *The Beggar's Opera*, had run off with her much older lover, Charles Powlett, 3rd Duke of Bolton. On hearing the news, the poet and dramatist John Gay observed: "The Duke of Bolton, I hear, has run away with Polly Peachum, having settled £400 a year on her during pleasure, and upon disagreement £200 a year." The implication was clear: in Gay's eyes Fenton had prostituted herself to the old duke, despite the couple having decided to marry.

By performing before the public, prima donnas were actively breaking protocols that wider society expected women to follow. The "ideal woman" lived a quiet, domestic life behind closed doors, counselled Georgian conduct books. The prima donna was quite the opposite. In the eyes of many, she was a public figure who used her voice and body to flaunt her talents, just like a common prostitute.

Sent into exile

Marriage could offer a prima donna some level of protection from public scrutiny, though that depended on whether her husband permitted her to continue performing. Many female singers, including Elizabeth Ann Linley, theatre manager Richard Brinsley Sheridan's wife, retired from public performance immediately after marrying. Others continued performing on stage after marrying fellow musicians, but this did not guarantee a happy union or a scandal-free

life. A number of prima donnas were abused by their husbands and could only leave the relationship because they had garnered social influence, wealth and the support of a powerful patron.

One such was English soprano Anna Selina (Nancy) Storace, who had earned the adoration of Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II and the position of prima donna in his new opera company in Vienna. Storace was a genuine superstar but that didn't stop her husband, the violinist John Abraham Fisher, from beating her so severely that Joseph II banished him from Venice. Storace never married again, though she had a 20-year-long romantic relationship with fellow singer John Braham.

Storace and Braham regularly appeared in concerts together, and this fuelled speculation about their relationship. Indeed, newspapers were not afraid to print sexually explicit comments. On 10 July 1797, the *Morning Post* informed its readers that "Braham has promised Storace to give her a very animating description of Moses erecting his serpent in the wilderness!" This anti-Semitic, sexually overt comment chastised Storace for engaging in a romantic relationship with a Jewish man.

Later that same year, the *Oracle and Public Advertiser* stated that Storace was "seriously intent on instructing young Braham in some Italian movements. It must be confessed that he is under the tuition of an experienced

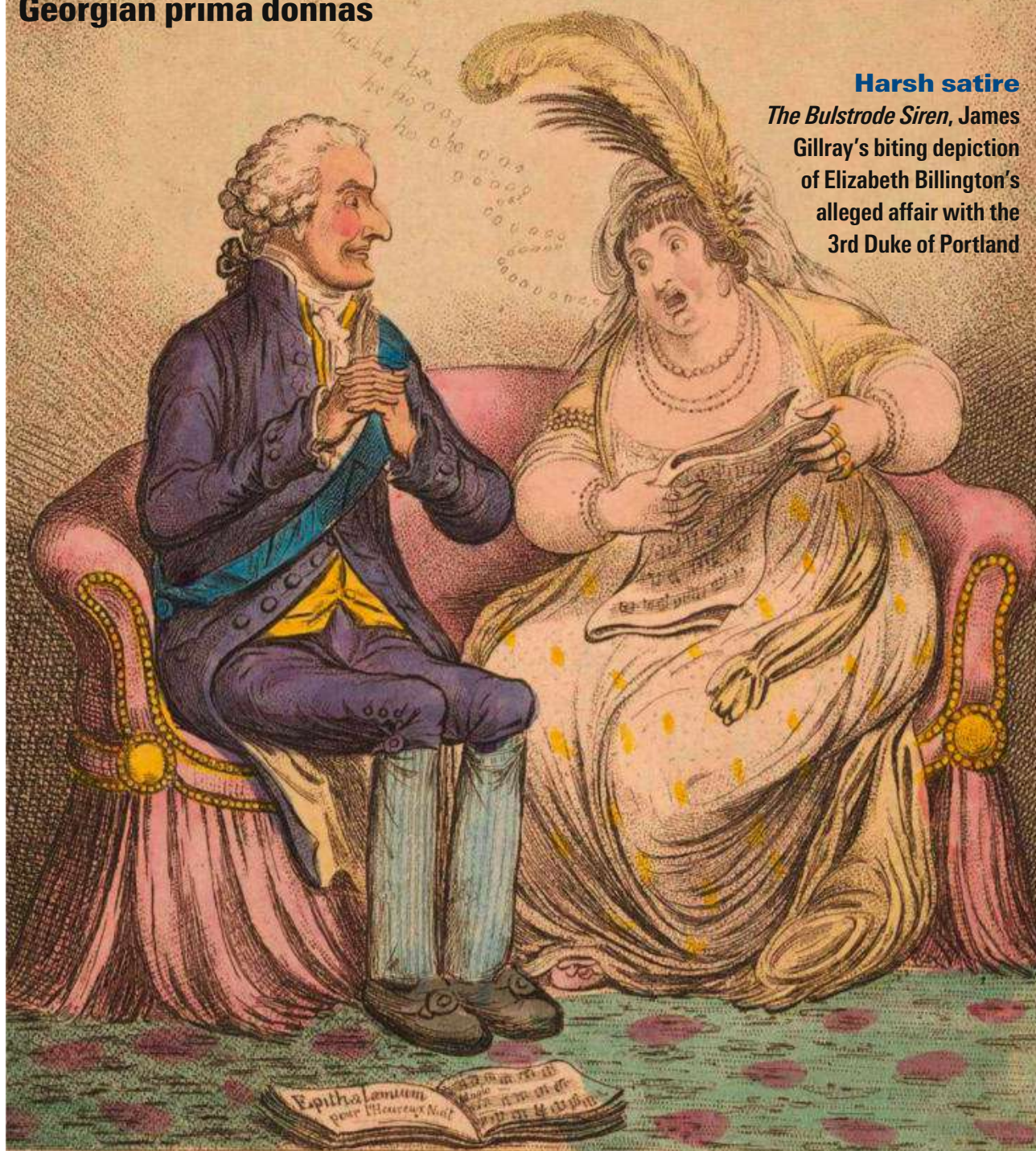
guide!" This time the press trained their guns on Storace's sexual experience – at 31, she was around nine years Braham's senior.

Press pariahs

Storace was not the only prima donna to be abused by her husband and later find solace in the arms of another man. Gertrud Mara frequently endured the drunken behaviour of her husband, German cellist Johann Baptist Mara. He also regularly engaged in affairs and spent all her money. Tired of his antics, in 1792 Mara decided to separate from her husband, and reportedly paid him an impressive sum in exchange for his co-operation.

He accepted the terms, and she never saw him again. But that wasn't enough to prevent the press from announcing that Mara was having an affair with English flautist Charles Florio. The newspapers clearly disapproved – and so, according to the *Morning Post*, did the public. In 1801, the paper claimed that, when the couple performed together in Glasgow, few spectators attended because

Georgian prima donnas



Harsh satire

The Bulstrode Siren, James Gillray's biting depiction of Elizabeth Billington's alleged affair with the 3rd Duke of Portland

In the eyes of the newspapers, engaging in a romantic relationship with an unmarried man was simply unacceptable

“the Scotch [carry] their moral feelings into public places”.

Neither Storace nor Mara remarried, though their relationships with Braham and Florio were long term. Storace even had a son with Braham. The press did not object to Storace or Mara escaping their abusive marriages, but publicly engaging in a romantic relationship with a man they could not and did not marry was deemed unacceptable.

Other prima donnas were similarly suspected of having extra-marital relationships, even when there was little evidence for them. Elizabeth Billington stood accused of

seducing a number of powerful men, including William Henry Cavendish Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland. Billington denied the affair but that didn't stop the caricaturist James Gillray satirising their relationship in an engraving titled “The Bulstrode Siren” (shown above).

Prima donnas were lionised for their musical abilities. But, as Billington's story demonstrates, there was a dark side to their celebrity: the unforgiving glare of public scrutiny. And, in some respects, attitudes haven't changed: if a number of recent period dramas are to be believed, prima donnas spent a lot more time in bed with the rich and famous than performing on stage.

Such depictions undermine the extraordinary talents of prima donnas by suggesting that they were all sexually promiscuous. The stark reality is that many prima donnas were unfairly branded immoral temptresses simply because their profession did not align with Georgian society's notion of appropriate female behaviour. **II**

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Dr Brianna Robertson-Kirkland is a lecturer in historical musicology at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her book *Venanzio Rauzzini and the Birth of a New Style in English Singing* will be published by Routledge in January 2022

SCANDALOUS SCREEN PORTRAYALS

Georgian stereotypes of prima donnas have proved enduring, as two recent period dramas prove

Siena Rosso in *Bridgerton*

Netflix's *Bridgerton* taps into two very real Georgian obsessions: propriety and scandal. Siena Rosso (played by Sabrina Bartlett) is an opera singer, though little screen time is devoted to her singing. Instead, she is often shown naked, lying in the arms of her secret lover, Viscount Anthony Bridgerton. Siena's styling – beauty spot, exposed shoulders and a scarlet dress – suggests she is a seductive temptress.

Bridgerton does well to show the unique social divide between Anthony and Siena. He is her social superior, but he risks his name and reputation if their liaison were ever made public. In reality, a prima donna in Siena's position also risked her reputation since a relationship with a wealthy nobleman would confirm what everyone already suspected.



Jenny Lind in *The Greatest Showman*

The Swedish soprano Jenny Lind was the inspiration behind one of the lead characters (played by Rebecca Ferguson) in the 2017 musical telling of showman PT Barnum's life. The film references several real-life events, including the time when Barnum risked everything to lure Lind out of retirement to tour the US.

Known as the “Swedish Nightingale”, Lind was hugely famous in 19th-century Europe and performed for Queen Victoria. She is undeniably talented in the film, but is also a seductress who tries to tempt Barnum into an affair. Of course, no such affair occurred.

In fact, the real Lind was close with another married man, composer Felix Mendelssohn. Their relationship was not publicly known when they were alive, but evidence has emerged that Mendelssohn wrote several love letters to Lind, which were later burned.



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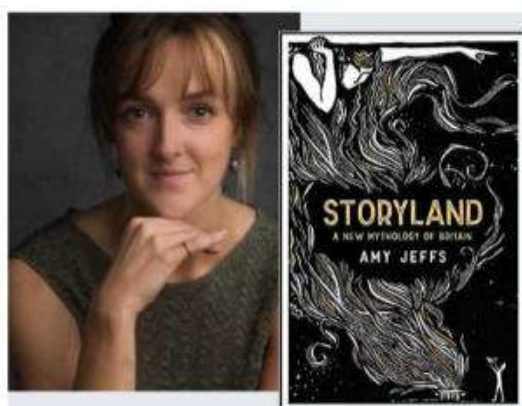
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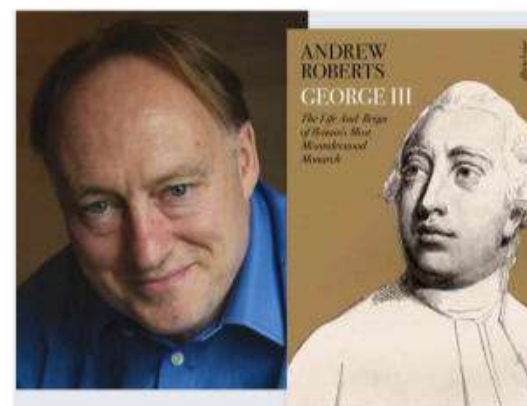
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Storyland: Truth, Myth and the Middle Ages
2 December

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Andrew Roberts
George III: The Life and Reign of Britain's Most Misunderstood Monarch
16 December

King George III is often depicted as a cruel tyrant whose time on the throne proved disastrous for the nation. Yet Andrew Roberts sets out to paint a very different picture: of an intelligent, benevolent monarch who skilfully navigated the turbulence of 18th-century politics and who was deeply devoted to his country's constitution.

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“Unless the Japanese got the US off their backs in the Pacific, **they believed they would face complete destruction**”

Eighty years ago Japan's surprise raid on Pearl Harbor forced the US off the fence and into the Second World War.

Ellie Cawthorne is making a new HistoryExtra podcast series about the attack, and she spoke to **Christopher Harding** about the long roots of Japan's disastrous decision



GETTY IMAGES

A devastating blow

Smoke rises from the wreckage of US warships during the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. In order to understand the attack, we need to have a sense of what was happening in Japan at this point, argues Christopher Harding

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The path to Pearl Harbor

Pearl Harbor is today seen as a turning point in the Second World War. What was the situation in Japan in the years leading up to its fateful decision to attack the US?

The big theme for this period in Japanese history was a sense that global events were turning against Japan. Particularly in military and rightwing circles, there was an idea that the interwar dream of internationalism only favoured the European colonial powers and the United States. Add to that the perceived threat of the Soviet Union, Chinese nationalists, and Americans across the Pacific, and Japan, with its rather awkward geography, was starting to feel encircled.

To understand the attack on Pearl Harbor fully, it's helpful to look further back still. Ever since Japan opened up to the west in the 1850s, there was always a concern that adopting the trappings of western modernity – technology, industry, weaponry, banking infrastructure and more – might put Japanese culture at risk. By the late 1930s, those concerns were being exploited by Japanese ideologues and military figures to argue that Japan's experimentation with civilian democracy wasn't working.

The feeling grew that the political status quo was failing the nation and civilian politicians were more interested in lining their pockets than strengthening Japan's position. People argued that the one institution that was not westernised, corrupt or self-seeking, was the military. The armed forces were held up as a proponent of the values that Japan ought to be preserving, like self-sacrifice for the good of the nation.

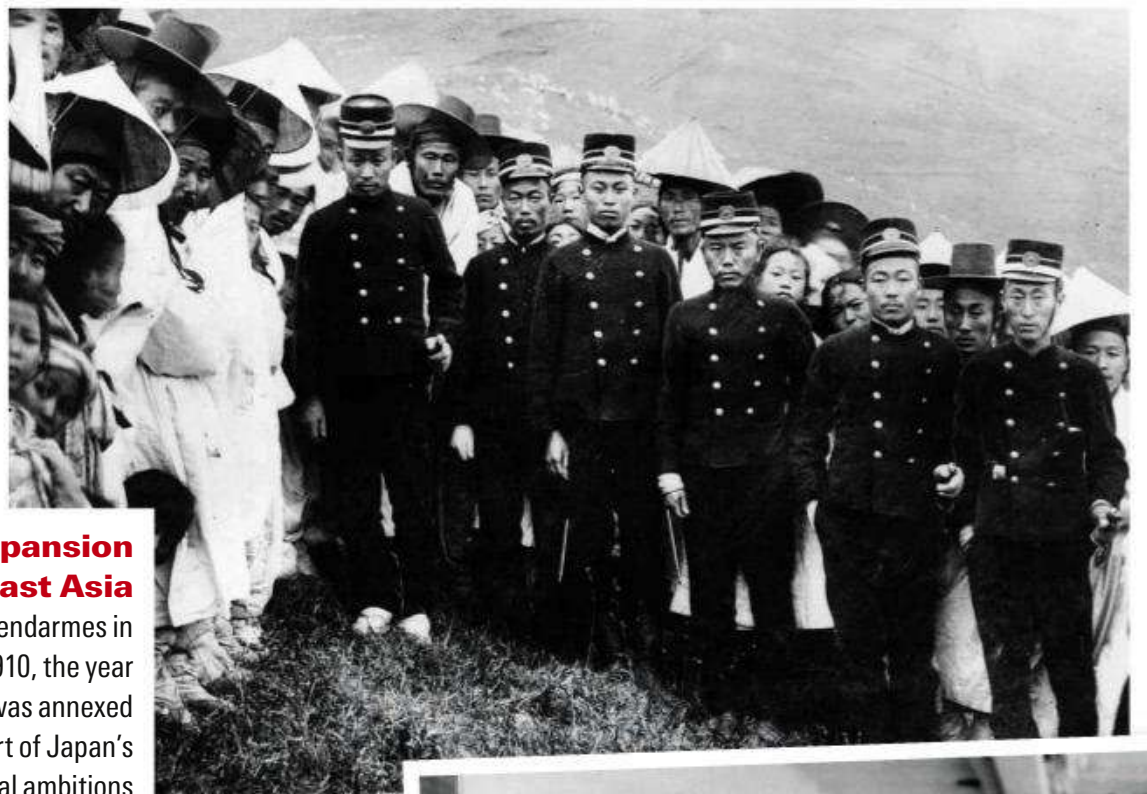
How influential was militarism in this period, and did it equate to greater warmongering?

Since 1889, according to the shape of Japan's constitution, the armed forces reported straight to the emperor. This gave them more influence, particularly in debates with civilian politicians over foreign policy and military hardware budgets. There was never a single moment of military takeover in Japan, but across the 1930s more military figures entered into influential cabinet roles, and the reputations of civilian politicians were damaged. Meanwhile the Imperial Military Reserve Association had grown to around 3 million members by the middle of the decade, and acted as a pressure group on government policy. So in cultural, practical and political terms, militarists started having more influence.

There were two broad factions within the military. The "Control" faction said: "Look, Japan has enemies, but modern warfare requires hi-tech equipment, industry and a strong economy. So Japan must be careful in

Expansion in east Asia

Japanese gendarmes in Korea in 1910, the year the country was annexed as part of Japan's imperial ambitions



New look Tokyo women in western dress, c1932. "Some feared that adopting the trappings of western modernity put Japanese culture at risk," says Christopher Harding

its foreign policy." They weren't exactly dovish, but certainly cautious. The other was the "Imperial Way" faction, which drew on ideology dating back to the 1880s that argued that what really counted was fighting spirit. You needed the courage to make the first move and be willing to lay down your life if necessary. Words like "retreat" were to be scrubbed from your vocabulary. They argued that because Japan's military had this indomitable spirit that countries like the US lacked, they should wage short, aggressive, hit-and-run conflicts sooner rather than later.

Another important development in the 1930s was a campaign of "government by assassination", as ultra-nationalists took matters into their own hands. A former finance minister was assassinated, as was



Pacific passengers Japanese immigrants arrive in California in 1931. Immigration was a source of tension between the US and Japan

PEARL HARBOR IN CONTEXT

On the morning of 7 December 1941 around 350 Japanese planes roared over the US naval base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in two waves, dropping bombs on the unsuspecting Pacific station. More than 2,400 Americans were killed in the surprise attack, with over 1,000 more sustaining injuries.

The ships were packed tightly together in the dock as part of American anti-sabotage measures, and the Japanese torpedoes swept through them with devastating effect: in total, 21 ships were sunk or sustained damage. More than 180 planes stationed on nearby airfields were also destroyed.

The US was incensed by the surprise raid. The next day, President Franklin D Roosevelt delivered his "Day of Infamy" speech to a joint session of the US Congress, after which the US declared war on Japan. With this, America was now part of the Second World War.



A step too far Japanese troops enter Manchuria during the 1931 invasion. Japan's annexation of the contested area was condemned by the League of Nations, and Japan left the League as a result

prime minister Inukai Tsuyoshi in 1932. There were a number of other attacks along with a failed military coup in 1936. None of these overturned the constitution, but they encouraged a sense that civilian democracy, as then practised in Japan, was no longer fit for purpose. In the run up to Pearl Harbor, the power of ordinary civilian democrats in debates over Japan's foreign policy had basically ebbed away completely.

What were some of Japan's ambitions on the global stage at this point?

Since opening to the world, the Japanese had sought to become a modern power, and one aspect of that ambition was imperialism. From the late 1860s to the 1890s, Japan began empire-building, starting with the annexation of the island that is now Hokkaido, followed by the Ryukyu islands, and, later, Taiwan. There was a self-conscious attempt to portray themselves as a civilising power, raising up and modernising their imperial possessions in their own image. Of course, the reality was exploitation, authoritarian rule, and the deaths of thousands who tried to oppose them.

Japan was resource-poor at the time, which was another driving force for expansion, but there was also a more defensive motivation at play. The Japanese would say that because they were so close to the Korean peninsula, they had to take an interest in mainland Asia. Going back to the 1870s, the

view had been that if the Japanese didn't either secure someone friendly on the peninsula, or secure it for themselves, the area risked being taken over by European imperialists. So, in 1910, the Japanese annexed Korea.

From there, it was hard to see where the line of defence should stop. To the north of the Korean peninsula was Manchuria, potentially contested by China and Russia (later the Soviet Union). There were the Americans across the Pacific and in south-east Asia; the British in Hong Kong; the French and Dutch in south-east Asia; China to the west; and the Russians to the north-west. So to the Japanese, the threat of encirclement looked quite real.

A key moment in Japanese expansion, which placed the nation in conflict with the international community, was the annexation of Manchuria.

What happened there?

Manchuria was a resource-rich region to the north-east of China that was contested between the Soviet Union, Chinese nationalists and Japan. Through the southern parts of Manchuria there was a railway network, which was surrounded by a corridor of land that was on a long-term lease to Japan. By

There was a sense that global events were turning against Japan. With its rather awkward geography, the nation was starting to feel encircled

September 1931, a group of radicals within the Kwantung Army, which had been assigned with protecting Japanese interests in the area, decided to launch a full-on takeover in Manchuria. They planted a bomb on the tracks of the Manchurian railway and falsely framed it as a Chinese attack, with corpses wearing Chinese uniforms strewn around to back up the claim.

This was used as a pretext to launch an offensive, which, within a few short months, resulted in a more or less full takeover. In March 1932, a puppet state controlled by the Japanese called Manchukuo was pronounced. This was a key moment on the road to Pearl Harbor because, from a western view, that was the point at which the Japanese became the "bad guy". The League of Nations commissioned an investigation, and ruled in the spring of 1933 that Japan was the aggressor in Manchuria. The Japanese responded by leaving the League.

Was departing the League of Nations a turning point in Japan's relations with the west?

It was another seven or eight years until the US really started putting the squeeze on Japan in terms of exports, so there was still a way to go before Japan was fully isolated. But

yes, people were certainly less favourable to the Japanese after that. And from the perspective of people inside Japan, leaving the League of Nations played into a more general sense of it being "us v them" – Japan against this fig leaf of an international community made up of Britain, the US and their friends.

This tension with the western-focused international

MORE FROM US

HistoryExtra Pearl Harbor podcast series

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Jubilation for Japan

Japanese soldiers celebrate their victory at Shanghai in 1937, during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Conflict with China was to prove a costly drain on Japanese resources

The US and Britain saw the Japanese as second-class citizens, both diplomatically and racially. That was grist to the mill of Japanese ideologues

community played on older insecurities. After fighting alongside the Allies in the First World War, the Japanese believed they'd earned a seat at the top table when it came to the 1919–20 Paris Peace Conference. But they were rebuffed, most notably in their proposal for a racial equality clause. This was a serious blow for the Japanese, who were highly aware that European colonialism was premised on the idea of a racial hierarchy, in which the so-called “yellow races” were quite low down.

Just a few years later, in 1924, the US Immigration Act tried to limit Japanese migration to America. That played on fears of a “yellow peril” and underscored the fact that the US and Britain saw the Japanese as second-class citizens, both diplomatically and racially. That was grist to the mill of ideologues in Japan.

What was Japan's relationship like with the US before Pearl Harbor?

Initially, there was a good commercial relationship, and a vibrant cultural relationship too. American jazz and Hollywood were

huge in places like Osaka and Tokyo. The idea of 1920s Japan being a cosmopolitan society was largely fuelled by a love of American culture. But while there was a lot of affection at the cultural and commercial level, this was never really the case at the diplomatic level.

There were always those who worried that the influence of selfish, grasping, soulless, western hyper-capitalism was undermining traditional Japanese values of family, a closeness to nature and self-sacrifice. That idea was constantly in the background, but came to the fore across the 1930s, when it suited people politically.

Could you highlight any key moments in the disintegration of this relationship?

There were two naval treaties, in 1922 and 1930, where the British, Americans and Japanese sought to come to an agreement about their relative naval strengths. The Japanese ended up being forced to agree to a smaller navy, adding to the feeling of being pushed around.

Various attempts made by Japanese

THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

Dayna Barnes gives **Ellie Cawthorne** an American perspective on the events leading up to Pearl Harbor

leaders to explain their need for security were not met favourably on the American side. From the Japanese point of view, especially once the Second World War began, it became clear that any attempts to wrap up the conflict in China or secure their resources in south-east Asia, would see the Americans pushing back more and more.

On 27 September 1940, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Why did Japan decide to enter that alliance, and what was the response of the US?

Some in Japan were inspired by what the Nazis were achieving, in terms of implementing strict top-down management of the economy as the most efficient way of building up a nation's power. (And we should remember that the full consequences of the Nazi regime weren't yet clear in the 1930s.) Entering the pact was also an opportunistic move. The French and British were clearly going to be under serious pressure due to the war in Europe, and this offered an opportunity for the Japanese to assert themselves in south-east Asia and make a grab for resources in places like Indochina.

The Americans were, of course, unhappy with the Tripartite Pact. After that point, the Japanese didn't feel like they got much sympathy at all from the US. Alongside the pact, there were a series of Japanese moves which seemed ever more aggressive as far as the Americans were concerned. In the summer of 1940, Japan had announced the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", which put forward the idea that Japan, China, Manchukuo, French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies would become a single co-operative and economic entity. Asians would stand up for Asia and throw off European and American colonialism.

This series of policy decisions and military moves by the Japanese upset the Americans and resulted in a ramping up of embargoes to the point where, in July 1941, Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the US. Embargoes on iron, steel and, crucially, oil were intended to be a way of refusing to help Japan carry out an aggressive foreign policy in its neighbourhood.

Attacking Pearl Harbor has often been described as a wild gamble. But were the Japanese generally optimistic about the prospect of a war with America?

There was a degree of optimism. It was never the expectation that the US would be defeated militarily. The purpose of a surprise attack was to damage American

Why did America oppose Japanese expansion into China?

Although the US was technically neutral in the conflicts in Europe and Asia up until the end of 1941, that isn't to say that they didn't have a dog in the fight. The US had great sympathy with Britain in the European theatre, and China in the Asian theatre. Considering the US and Japan had strong business ties, the groundswell of public support for China may seem somewhat surprising. Some of the support was because of the huge market potential of China if it became more developed. There was also an idea that Nationalist China was something like an early version of the US – having thrown off the imperial system, it had the potential to embrace an American-style democracy. The success of American missionaries in China led to a sentiment of the Chinese being "like us".

When war erupted between Japan and China, in which Japan was certainly the aggressor, it was a real mess for the US. On the one hand, they wanted China to win, but Japan was also helping fuel the US economy by buying US materials to fight the war.

Did the Americans feel threatened by the Japanese before Pearl Harbor?

No, not at all. From the American perspective, events in Asia were largely a sideshow to those in Europe. The Americans minimised the threat Japan posed. Even isolationists were saying: "We can be assertive against Japan, take a hard line, level embargoes and force a tough negotiating position." Most



Roosevelt and Churchill, 1941. "Although the US was technically neutral before December 1941, they had great sympathy with Britain and China," says Dayna Barnes

people believed that Japan wouldn't dare attack the US and even if they did, it wouldn't matter because the US was so much stronger. There was also a ridiculous racialised scepticism about Japan's military prowess, despite the fact that they had clearly disproven this in conflicts like the 1904–05 Russo-Japanese War, which saw the Japanese triumph over tsarist Russia.

So the attack on Pearl Harbor really did blindsides most Americans?

The American public, absolutely. It also surprised many policy planners. The US was concerned that when they levelled embargoes, Japan might push south into European colonies in south-east Asia to secure other sources of oil. But not that Japan would attack the US itself.

Confident of their own strength, American diplomats at home were certain that the Japanese would have to concede. But what's interesting is that if you look at the diaries of diplomats stationed in Japan, they had a different perspective. They even wrote about feeling relieved on hearing about the attack because of a growing sense of impending doom and dread. For those who had been embedded in Japanese society, it was clear that conflict was becoming inevitable.

Dayna Barnes is senior lecturer in modern history at City, University of London, specialising in America foreign policy and east Asia



A Chinese Nationalist poster from the Second Sino-Japanese War. The US wanted China to win the conflict, but Japan was helping fuel the American economy by purchasing US-made goods



There was a feeling that if Japan couldn't extend its dominance, it would be at serious strategic risk. Time was running out

to a meeting like that might just have held off the hawks. To be honest, though, it's hard to see what the terms of an agreement would have been. China was a red line for both sides.

Nonetheless, there were months of disagreement at the top of Japanese power about what should be done. The final sign-off for Pearl Harbor didn't happen until just a few days before the attack. By then, General Tōjō Hideki had replaced the previous prime minister. He was hailed as someone who could get things done. There was a sense in Japan that they had tried very hard diplomatically and there was still significant disagreement. So the hawks won out in those top-level arguments.

By late 1941, the war in China had got to the point where unless the Japanese got the US off their back in the Asia-Pacific region, they would ultimately face collapse and defeat. It was clear to a lot of people in Japan that a war with the US was coming, and that they would be in the strongest position if they struck the first blow. And, almost inexplicably to us now, there was a serious underestimation of the degree to which the American population would be willing to fight back. **H**

AKG-IMAGES

Christopher Harding is senior lecturer in history at the University of Edinburgh. His BBC Radio 3 series, *Japan in Five Lives*, is available on BBC Sounds

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The BBC Radio 3 series **Our Fathers' War** examines the lives of US soldiers in the Second World War. It's due to begin on Monday 29 November



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A nation of warriors From 1937 onwards, a "spiritual mobilization" campaign in Japan framed the nation's conflict as essential for its survival. It even schooled children on why the Japanese had to fight

power in the region enough that the Japanese could take over additional parts of south-east Asia without US interference, and to deal such a blow to American morale that the US would be willing to negotiate.

Perhaps more important than optimism was an acute sense of desperation. Due to the war in China and expansion in south-east Asia, Japan faced a real danger of overstretch. In early autumn 1941, there was a feeling that if they weren't able to extend their dominance in Asia, particularly after the US embargoes, their resources would dry up and they'd be at serious strategic risk. Time was running out.

How much were ordinary Japanese people supportive of the prospect of war against the US?

It's important to remember that by late 1941, Japan had already been at war for four years, throughout which the Japanese population had been squeezed by a government desperately trying to finance a war with China that was spiralling out of control. This was felt in economic restrictions, from rice rationing to attempts to get people to dress more austere.

From 1937 onwards, there was also a "spiritual mobilization" campaign, part of which involved explaining to schoolchildren why the Japanese had to fight. That campaign is really important to understanding Pearl Harbor because ordinary people were

indoctrinated in the idea that hostile, encircling powers were intent on destroying Japan. By the time you get to the decision to attack Pearl Harbor, the Japanese people had already been persuaded that this conflict was existential: a war of self-defence to save Japan from complete destruction.

What was the last shot at averting war with America?

In August 1941, US president Franklin D Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter, which some in Japan saw, effectively, as a declaration of war. While the Japanese prime minister Konoe Fumimaro tried to arrange talks with Roosevelt to resolve the situation, he was rebuffed. It was clear the Japanese would have to leave China if there was to be any kind of agreement. But to the Japanese, this prospect was impossible – the general public would have gone mad due to the sacrifices already made and deaths incurred.

If there had been a meeting between Roosevelt and the Japanese prime minister before the "Hull note" was issued in November 1941 [the final US proposal demanding Japanese withdrawals from China and French Indochina], then potentially things could have been different. There were always different factions fighting for control of Japanese policy and a favourable outcome

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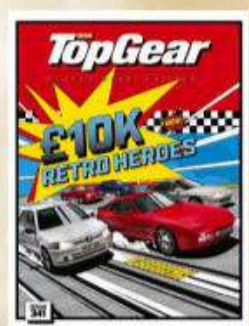


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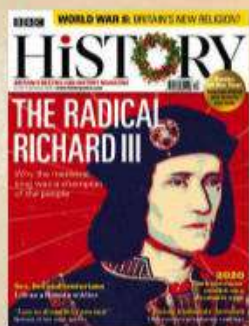


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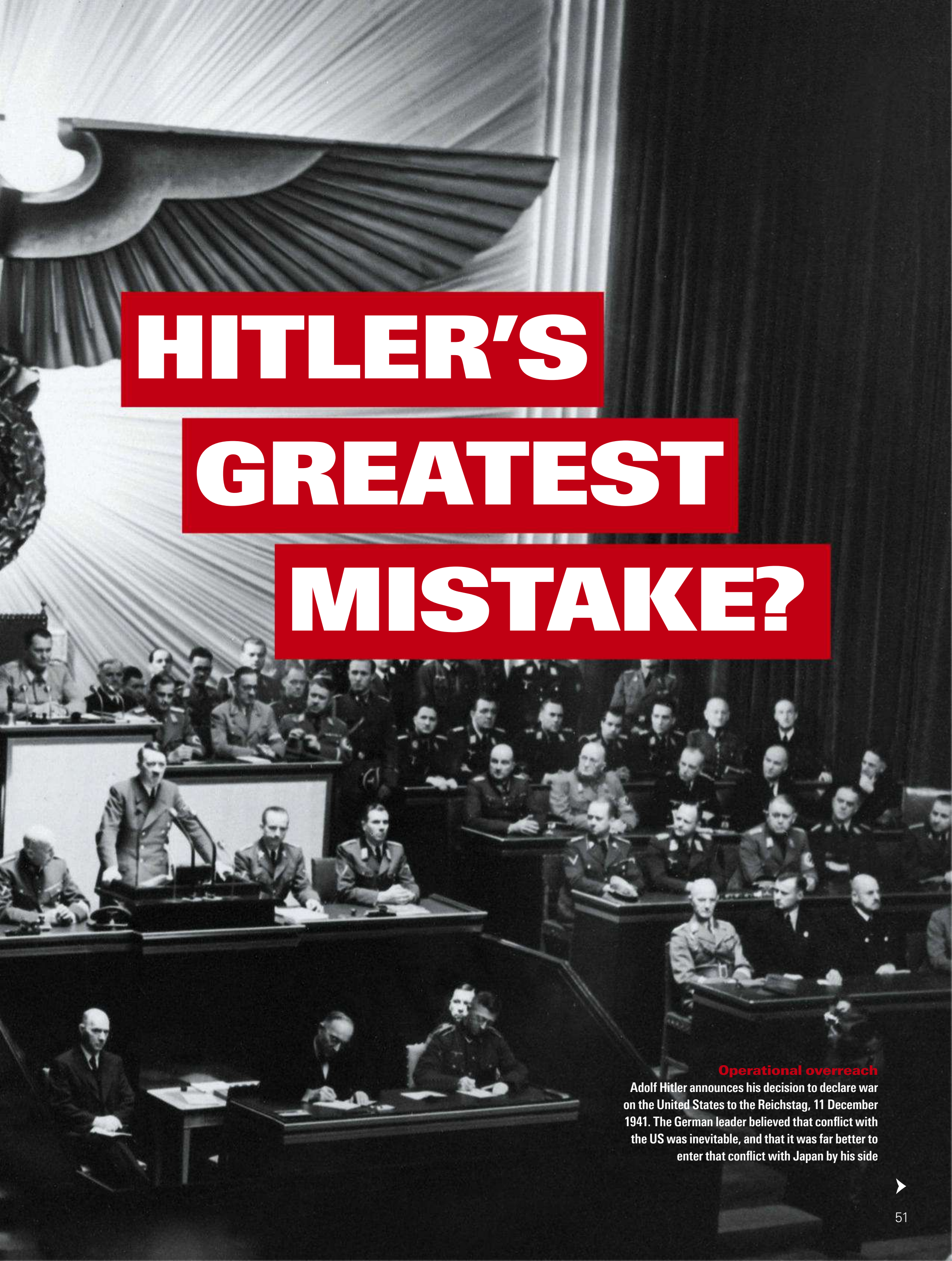


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Four days after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the German dictator declared war on the United States, in what is often viewed as one of the greatest strategic errors in modern history. But, argues **Klaus Schmider**, there was method to Hitler's "madness"



HITLER'S

GREATEST

MISTAKE?

Operational overreach

Adolf Hitler announces his decision to declare war on the United States to the Reichstag, 11 December 1941. The German leader believed that conflict with the US was inevitable, and that it was far better to enter that conflict with Japan by his side

On 3 January 1942 Adolf Hitler took time off from managing the defence of the embattled eastern front to receive a visitor at his East Prussian headquarters, the Wolfsschanze. The Japanese envoy, General Oshima, was paying him his second house call in less than three weeks. Such a small gap between two visits was unprecedented and could only be justified by the need to keep Germany's ally abreast of new and unforeseen developments.

In this case, the dictator briefed his guest on how the German army in Russia had been faring since Army Group Centre under Fedor von Bock had terminated its unsuccessful operation against Moscow on 4 December 1941. The Germans had then quickly gone on the defensive when they found themselves on the receiving end of a Soviet counteroffensive that had begun on 6 December. By the end of the year, Army Group Centre's position was verging on the desperate. Hitler, no doubt aware that rumours about these developments had been reaching the Japanese embassy, set out to reassure his guest that things were well in hand.

Only a change in the weather had stalled the German advance on Moscow, Hitler explained, and there were very few cases of serious frostbite requiring the amputation of limbs – a depiction of events wildly at variance with the reality on the ground.

Inevitably, the United States, the new belligerent that had just been dragged into the war by Tokyo and Berlin, also featured in

Hitler sought to reassure his Japanese guest that, despite recent reverses, the invasion of the Soviet Union was well in hand



Admitting defeat

It was to General Oshima (above), Japan's ambassador to Germany, that Hitler made the remarkable admission that he had "no knowledge of how to defeat the US"



this exchange. And it was now that Hitler made a remarkable admission to his guest: "He professed to have no knowledge of how to defeat the US."

Why had Hitler said this? An error on the part of an overworked stenographer can be safely ruled out as the cause of this eye-catching quote, since on 15 January Hitler made an assertion that was, if anything, even more astonishing. Talking to a small group of acolytes, he claimed that "should this war turn out to be winnable at all, it will only be won by America".

These comments were recorded for posterity between three and four weeks after Germany had made the seemingly gratuitous

(and avoidable) decision to join Japan in hostilities against the US, on 11 December. The three main "Axis" powers – Japan, Germany and Italy – were united in the Tripartite Pact signed in September 1940, but this treaty was defensive and consultative in nature. Germany was not required to join the Japanese if they chose to initiate hostilities against America unilaterally. And yet Hitler had done just that.

The unwinnable war

The German dictator first making such a momentous decision, and then indicating shortly after that he had no clue what kind of strategy to pursue against the US, appears to



Eye of the storm

German troops on the eastern front, in early 1942. If Hitler had grasped the gravity of the German position in the east at the beginning of December 1941, would he have declared war on the US?



Call to arms

A c1941 Soviet propaganda poster declares "Let's fight for Moscow!". Germany's failure to capture the city was crucial to the war's outcome

validate the long-held theory that declaring war on America was a "crazy" act – one of Hitler's greatest mistakes. This seems especially true as the Red Army's successful defence of Moscow had made even Hitler realise that the war was now unwinnable. However, a close analysis of the political and military events leading up to Hitler's fateful decision reveals a different story. It suggests that the decision might not have been quite as ludicrous as it first appears.

We need to explore three crucial factors that influenced the Nazi leader's thinking in the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. The first is the shifting situation on the eastern front, and

Hitler declares war on the US

Hitler's awareness (or lack of awareness) of the weakness of the German position there. The second is Germany's ongoing attempts to convince Japan to join the war against the western Allies. And lastly, we should consider the increasing likelihood of America entering the global conflict, irrespective of whether Germany declared war first.

But let's start by turning to the eastern front, because one of the chief accusations levelled against Hitler is that, by declaring war on the US, he was condemning Germany to a conflict with not one, but two mighty powers: the first America; the second, the Soviet Union. Yet on 11 December 1941 (the date of his declaration of war), the USSR, in Hitler's eyes, was anything but powerful.

From mid-September to mid-October, the Red Army had lost more than 100 divisions in three encirclement battles. Together with the loss of the heavy industry of the Donetsk in late October, this appeared to make a Soviet recovery highly unlikely. Against such a backdrop, the failure to take Moscow and the beginning of the Soviet winter offensive on 6 December were seen as minor setbacks.

While most histories describe the Soviet counterattack as swift and devastating, in truth it was lumbering and haphazard. It was only on around 11 or 12 December that it became obvious that the Soviet offensive was going from strength to strength and would soon force the Germans to contemplate a major withdrawal across a broad front. Until then, the counterattack gave the German leadership far less concern than other Soviet offensives had earlier in the conflict. To Hitler, therefore, there was nothing to suggest an escalation of the war on his eastern flank – certainly not enough to give him pause for thought over declaring war on America.

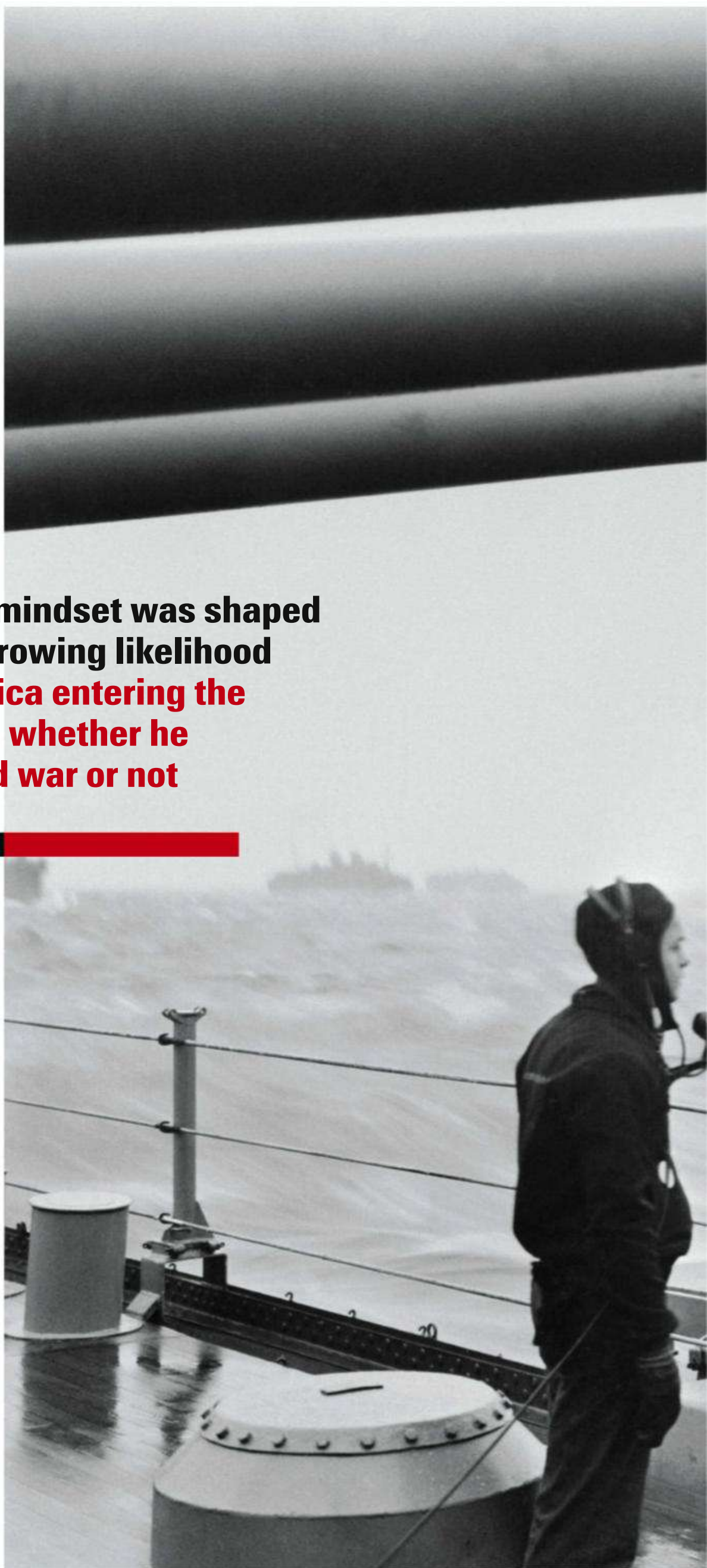
A Japanese bombshell

The second critical factor here is Germany's relationship with the Japanese, and that relationship's role in triggering Hitler's decision to move against America.

In early December 1941, as fighting raged in the Soviet Union, Hitler had to deal with surprising news from a different quarter. The German embassy in Tokyo reported that the Japanese were proposing a joint alliance against the United States and Great Britain.

This was a hugely unexpected development, for Hitler had all but given up on the prospect of Japan ever entering the conflict against the western powers. For almost a year now, the German leader had made repeated attempts to draw Japan into the war, notably encouraging it to move against the British and Dutch colonial empires in the far east. However, his efforts had repeatedly

Hitler's mindset was shaped by the growing likelihood of America entering the conflict, whether he declared war or not



MARY EVANS



Show of support

A sailor on an American warship keeps watch over merchant vessels. Hitler was rattled by the US decision, taken in September 1941, to escort British convoys to a point in the mid-Atlantic



Hitler declares war on the US



Axis allies

Nazi foreign minister Ribbentrop meets his Japanese counterpart, Yōsuke Matsuoka (bottom right), whose pro-German instincts were thwarted by Japan's military

foundered on the rock of internal Japanese wrangling and contradictory promises.

A Japanese commitment had seemed unlikely to materialise quickly because the Japanese armed services and assorted civilian power players couldn't agree on matters of foreign policy. Japan's pro-German foreign minister, Yōsuke Matsuoka, found himself thwarted by the Japanese navy, which feared a US intervention should Japan help herself to south-east Asia. Meanwhile, the army had commitments on the Asian continent that were likely to clash with the idea of a war against the western powers. As for the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, his commitment to the European Axis can only be described as lukewarm.

To make matters worse for Hitler, in spring 1941 some members of the Japanese government appeared to be giving serious thought to signing a treaty with the US, which would de-escalate the ongoing war in China and take Japan out of the Tripartite Pact in all but name. We now know that the odds were very much against this initiative coming anywhere near fruition, but at the time German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was deeply alarmed by the prospect.

Despite all this, in late July 1941 the Japanese occupation of the southern half of Indochina and the termination of oil exports to Japan by the US, Great Britain and the Dutch East Indies, finally put the Japanese in a position where the consensus for war would soon reach a critical mass.

However, the Germans could draw little solace from this. Berlin's experience of bilateral relations had seen a number of Japanese representatives profess to being deeply impressed by Germany's victories, while making completely contradictory promises about a future Japanese commitment to the war of the Axis.

Hitler's new horizons

By late October 1941, Hitler was so thoroughly tired of this chorus of empty promises from Japan that he intimated to visitors at the Wolfsschanze that he had all but given up on the idea of Japan ever joining the European Axis. The Japanese offer of a joint alliance against the United States and Great Britain in December 1941 changed the situation altogether, and would have a profound impact on Hitler's decision to declare war on America.

To complete the picture, we also need to examine US-German relations, which, over the course of the Second World War, had deteriorated rapidly.

The early years of the conflict saw US president Franklin D Roosevelt influencing public opinion and key legislators in all sorts



New hope

Members of Britain's Auxiliary Territorial Service with American weaponry, c1941-43



Pedal power

Japanese troops enter French Indochina. At the end of 1941 the prowar faction was in the ascendancy in Tokyo, but for how long?

By March 1941, in a confidential address, Hitler was already referring to the US as Germany's "main rival"

Land rescue

American troops arrive in Iceland, 1941. The relief of the British garrison there provided further evidence of burgeoning US support for the Allies



of ways with a view to supporting Britain and its allies. This process culminated with the passing of Lend-Lease in March of 1941 (which saw the US supplying Britain and other Allied nations with food, oil and weapons) and the relief of the British garrison of Iceland by US Marines in July. Then, in mid-September 1941, the US Navy began escorting British convoys from American waters to a mid-Atlantic meeting point. A number of these measures required supporting votes in Congress, and the outcome of these was by no means a foregone conclusion, but on two occasions, the torpedoing of US merchantmen by U-boats secured Roosevelt just about enough votes.

Hitler followed these events very closely and with growing concern. By late March 1941, he was already referring to the US as Germany's "main rival" in a confidential address. The news of the occupation of Iceland saw him call for the accelerated delivery of the new Heinkel He 177, since this was the only Luftwaffe bomber with the capability to carry a useful load of bombs to the Arctic island.

Matters came to a head over an issue that historians have thus far not given the attention it deserves. On 13 November 1941, the US Congress agreed to rescind the last article in the Neutrality Law of 1939, a development that gave US merchant ships the permission to unload their cargoes in British ports. Hitler immediately grasped the significance of this piece of legislation, recognising that it would mean that his forces would sink more US merchant ships, attacks that were already having a tangible impact on opinion in Washington. Back in November 1939, the German leader had described this possibility as the tripwire that would indicate American willingness to seek an open war. From his perspective in the final weeks of 1941, conflict between America and Germany was now inevitable, whether he declared war or not.

The moment to strike

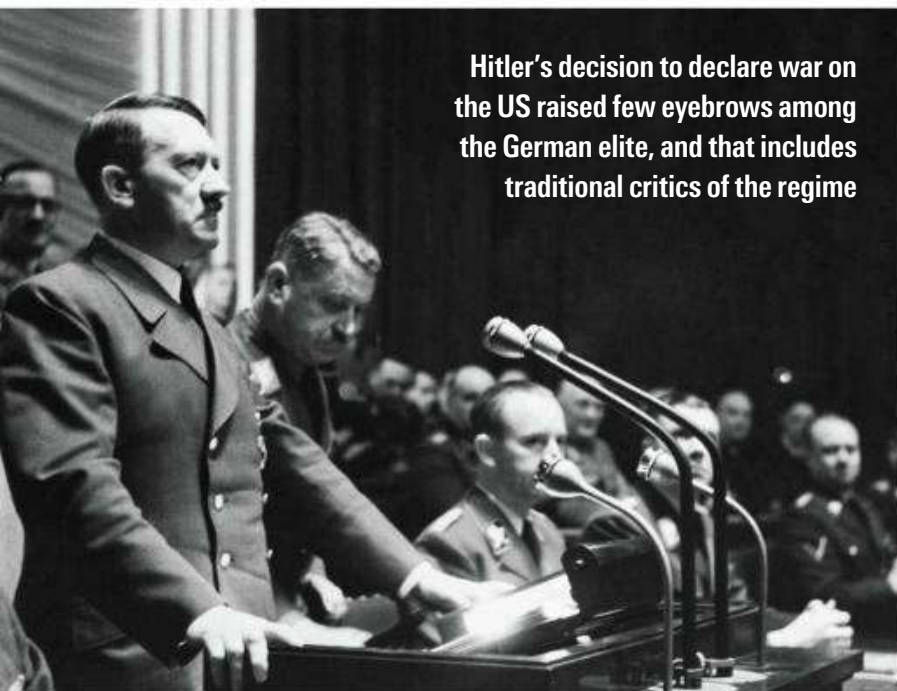
Hitler was left at his wits' end – and, on 19 November 1941, is even on record reflecting about the possibility of a compromise peace with Great Britain. Days later, the Japanese offer of an alliance against Britain

and America gave him the opportunity to face the US challenge with a move far more to his liking: the escalation to global war.

But this still doesn't explain why Hitler declared war on America in early December 1941 – without, for example, even asking for a Japanese declaration of war on the USSR. The move may appear rash but it makes more sense when we consider this point: while the Germans were unconcerned about the USSR's fighting power, they were highly sensitive to the prospect of the fragile prowar consensus in Tokyo being shattered and the peace faction carrying the day. In short, Hitler felt he had to strike while the metal was hot.

Evidence of this line of thinking can be found in German concerns expressed even after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The Germans feared that the Americans might resurrect the idea of appeasing Tokyo by accepting some of their territorial aggrandisement. Hence, simply waiting for a couple of weeks and taking stock of the new situation as it developed was never considered a viable alternative in Berlin. Based on past

Hitler declares war on the US



Hitler's decision to declare war on the US raised few eyebrows among the German elite, and that includes traditional critics of the regime

form, the Germans equated the Japanese willingness to go to war with a flickering flame that had to be carefully nourished, lest it be snuffed out again.

Miscalculation of the century

The act of declaring war on America – the declaration was handed to the US envoy, Leland B Morris, in the Auswärtiges Amt (German foreign office) at noon on 11 December – left very little trace in the letters and diaries of the German government elite of the time. Nobody denounced it as an act of lunacy. Even the undersecretary of the Auswärtiges Amt, widely known to be a critic of the regime, accepted it as a given and merely reflected on whether it might have been shrewder to await a US declaration of war, instead of taking the initiative.

Hitler soon realised that he had just made the strategic miscalculation of the century. The war in Russia, far from settling down to a stalemate, was increasing in ferocity with every passing day. This in turn required a re-direction of economic assets that had already been mentally set aside to boost the Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine's strength, which would be needed for a war against Anglo-American naval power.

But the fact is, Hitler didn't know all this on 11 December 1941. On that fateful day, the dismantling of the last US Neutrality Laws, the Japanese offer of an alliance and the apparent neutralisation of much of the Red Army's war-making potential had come together at a moment in time to suggest a unique window of opportunity. Rather than allowing it to slam shut, Hitler decided to seize the moment so that he could wage war on America with a new ally by his side. **H**

Klaus Schmider is senior lecturer at the War Studies Department at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. His books include *Hitler's Fatal Miscalculation: Why Germany Declared War on the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2021)

HITLER'S STRATEGIC ERRORS

Klaus Schmider highlights four other instances in which the Nazi leader's judgment failed him

A rally of the pro-Nazi Sudeten German Party, August 1938. The occupation of the Sudetenland that year wasn't enough to sate Hitler's expansionary instincts



Risking a European war in 1938

In September 1938, the German leader laid claim to the Sudetenland, the border regions of the Czechoslovak state that were populated by ethnic Germans. Over the course of three summit meetings, the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, indicated the British and French willingness to acquiesce to most of the German demands and even guarantee Czech agreement to them. Yet Hitler then went out of his way to sabotage the nascent agreement by increasing his demands again and again.

In the end, a compromise was reached through Benito Mussolini, who had no desire for a European war at this moment in time. This was fortunate for Hitler since some of the weapons systems that would go on to play a key role in ensuring German success in 1940 were only available as prototypes (the Panzer III and the Bf 109 E fighter

plane) or indeed not at all (the Czech-designed Panzer 38 [t]).

Confronting the French and Czechoslovak armies and their air arms would have made for a major challenge in 1938. Meanwhile, the gradual arrival of a British expeditionary force on the continent, together with the uncertain stance of Poland, would have added to Germany's problems. What's more, the British naval blockade would have had a damaging effect much sooner than it did in 1939–40, since in 1938 the USSR, rather than being a de facto ally of Germany and conduit for raw materials (following the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact), would have been an unfriendly neutral.

Leaving aside some of the desperate orders Hitler issued in the last months of the war, the dictator's willingness to take Germany to the brink of war in 1938 must be rated as his "craziest" military decision.



Despite the success of its invasion of Poland (shown, left, in September 1939), the operation suggested that the Wehrmacht still had lessons to learn

Planning the invasion of western Europe in November 1939

The autumn of 1939 saw the only instance where the German dictator and the great majority of his senior army commanders were truly at loggerheads and with no obvious way out of the impasse. The issue was not the war as such, but the fact that Hitler wanted to turn the army around as quickly as possible after victory in Poland and fling it against the western powers. The generals were horrified by this; the Polish campaign had revealed shortfalls of equipment, and suggested that the German army and air force still had lessons to learn.

The invasion plan also lacked imagination and would have led to an engagement between the bulk of both forces in central Belgium, with the Luftwaffe reduced to a marginal role by the winter weather. Allied firepower superiority alone would have virtually guaranteed a stalemate.

The stand-off got to a point where even the notoriously pro-Nazi general Walter von Reichenau was prepared to leak information in the hope of compromising the offensive. Others plotted a coup against the regime. In the end, only the brutally cold winter of 1939/40 forced a postponement of the operation.

Halting his panzers before they reached Dunkirk

On the evening of 23 May 1940, the German army took a fateful decision in northern France. With German armour just 10 miles away from Dunkirk – where the British field army hoped to be evacuated back to England – the order was given to halt the advance.

Much of the British Expeditionary Force and several French corps had a larger distance to cover before they reached Dunkirk, but had to do so while executing a fighting retreat. Nothing short of a miracle would be required to save the bulk of the British army from being cut off from all sides and heading into captivity.

Yet the Germans, seemingly inexplicably, halted their advance until the early morning of 27 May. This decision has been put down to a number of reasons, some of them far-fetched.

The most plausible is a crisis of command on the German side. After Army Group A's commander in chief, Gerd von Rundstedt, had temporarily halted the advance out of concern over vulnerable flanks, the German army high command made the unilateral decision to transfer most German armour away from Army

Group A to the adjoining Army Group B. Hitler resented the fact that he had not been consulted on this move and returned control of the armour to Rundstedt, who decided to keep them stationary for another 24 hours.

By the time Rundstedt realised that this amounted to a horrible mistake and gave orders to resume the advance, the bulk of the BEF had reached Dunkirk and a perimeter defence manned by French and British forces was in place.



An armband worn by an Estonian recruit to the SS. The harshness of the German regime in the east ensured that support from the occupied territories was weak

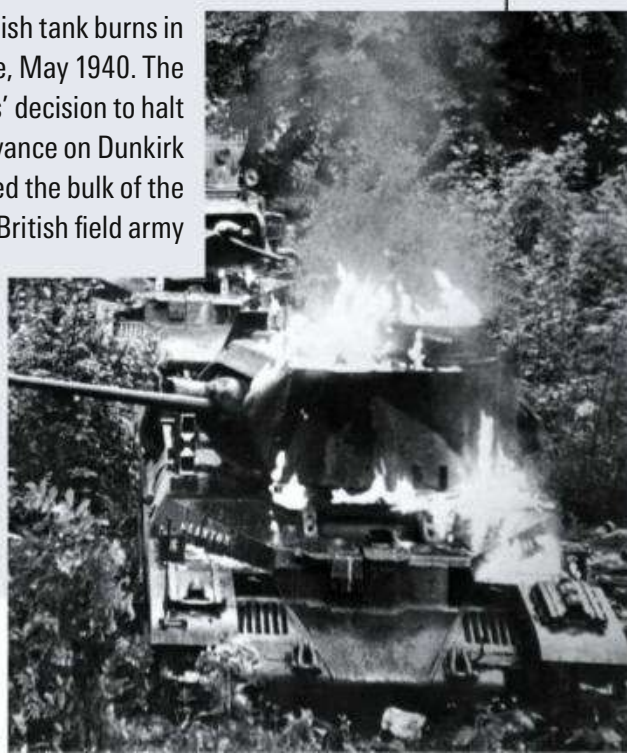
Creating a barbaric regime in the USSR

Germany's strategic situation makes Hitler's decision to invade the USSR in June 1941 a questionable one, to say the least. But it should not be regarded as gratuitously "crazy". Why? Well, all the military establishments of the world in 1940–41 held the Red Army in low regard.

However, when it came to administering the occupied Soviet provinces, the experience of the First World War strongly suggested that it was of crucial importance to have the willing collaboration of at least one major ethnic group, like the Ukrainians. During the First World War, this had greatly facilitated the running of the occupied territories and the defeat of insurgent movements.

One senior Nazi leader, Alfred Rosenberg, made a suggestion along these lines, only to be given the brush-off by Hitler. Instead, the sheer brutality of the Nazi occupation would greatly hamper the exploitation of the occupied western districts of the USSR and foster the partisan movement. Meanwhile, military collaboration by Ukrainians, Estonians and Latvians was limited to the raising of a handful of SS divisions during the latter phase of the war in the east. Nowhere did Hitler's ideological conceit trump sound strategy as clearly as in this case.

A British tank burns in France, May 1940. The Germans' decision to halt their advance on Dunkirk saved the bulk of the British field army



Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Which Christmas traditions, if any, is Charles Dickens responsible for?

►►► Many of the Christmas traditions enjoyed in the UK today were introduced or popularised during Dickens' lifetime: the first Christmas card was sent, crackers were invented, and Prince Albert famously introduced Christmas trees from his native Germany. Old traditions such as carol singing, feasting, and giving presents were reinvigorated in the Victorian era and became closely associated with Christmas time.

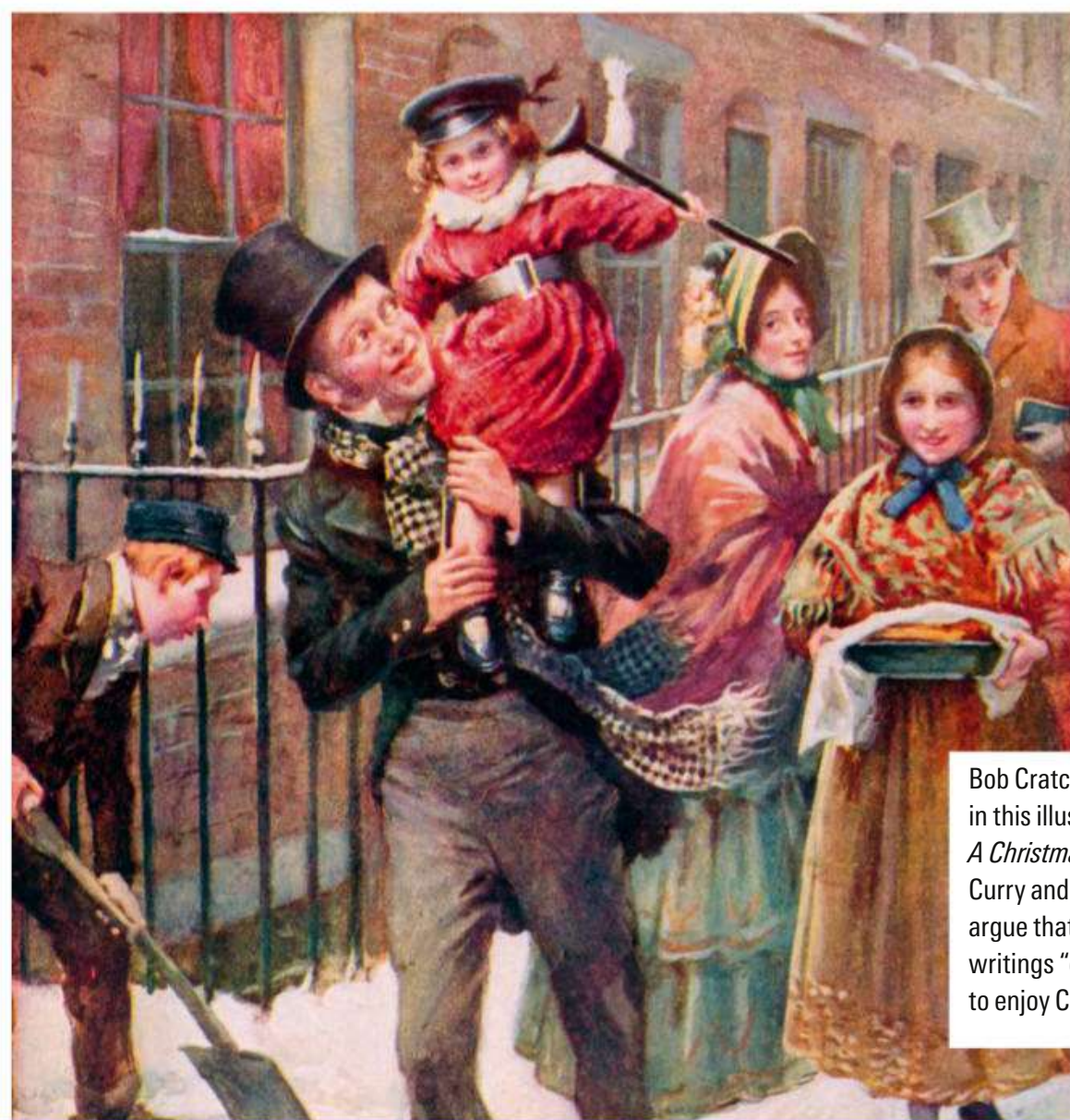
Dickens himself wasn't responsible for these traditions. However, his vibrant and evocative depictions of Christmas celebrations cemented his association with the time of year and encouraged others to enjoy Christmas anew.

The most enduring example is *A Christmas Carol* (1843). With this novel, Dickens capitalised on and helped to drive a burgeoning Christmas publishing trade. He also wrote books that could

be given as gifts: in addition to *A Christmas Carol*, he published four other Christmas books, as well as extra Christmas issues of his weekly magazines. These editions were distributed every Christmas for almost 20 years, and they became an anticipated fixture in the publishing calendar.

But it is *A Christmas Carol* that has best stood the test of time. Its depictions of family, hardship, cruelty and kindness, but most importantly personal transformation and forgiveness, have become central to how we understand and mark Christmas. For many, it is the act of returning to this story – whether through books, theatre or film – that has now become a tradition of the festive season.

.....
Emma Curry and Aine McNicholas,
V&A postdoctoral research fellows working
on the Deciphering Dickens project



Bob Cratchit carries Tiny Tim in this illustration from *A Christmas Carol*. Emma Curry and Aine McNicholas argue that Charles Dickens' writings "encouraged others to enjoy Christmas anew"



A section of the oldest mattress on record (above, wrapped in a plaster jacket), which was made from compacted grass, sedge and leaves

When was the first mattress made?

►►► The oldest mattress on record dates from the Stone Age and is around 77,000 years old. Archaeologists uncovered the mattress, or its remnants, at the Sibudu Cave site in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. The mattress was made from compacted grass and a grass-like plant called sedge, and on top of it were leaves from the River Wild-quince tree, or *Cryptocarya woodii*.

The people who made these bedding materials probably selected them carefully: River Wild-quince leaves have chemical properties that deter insects, including mosquitoes, which would have been unwelcome visitors at this riverside cave site. Some indigenous groups in Africa still use River Wild-quince leaves for similar reasons.

Archaeological evidence suggests that the mattress was periodically burned, perhaps to cleanse it of pests or bodily fluids, before being renewed with fresh materials. At around 30cm high and up to 2 square metres in size, the mattresses were probably quite comfortable and capable of sleeping an entire family.

.....
Sasha Handley, historian and author of *Sleep in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2016)

DID YOU KNOW...?

Undercover communists?

The 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life* was considered possibly subversive on first release. In the 1940s, FBI agents frequently watched movies looking for "communist propaganda". The agent who viewed *It's a Wonderful Life* worried that the Scrooge-like villain, Mr Potter, was "a rather obvious attempt to discredit bankers". This was, apparently, "a common trick used by communists". In the end, no further action was taken against the film.



The FBI suspected *It's a Wonderful Life* of containing hidden communist messages

Heavenly inspiration

The man who wrote the words to the popular Christmas carol 'In Dulci Jubilo' is said to have heard angels singing them. Heinrich Seuse (or Henry Suso) was a German friar and mystic of the 14th century. In a medieval biography, the author describes Seuse's depression, before stating that angels arrived and one of them "began a joyous song about the infant Jesus". The others then told Seuse he must "cast off all his sorrows" and "dance with them in heavenly fashion".

Boozy bust-up

On 24 and 25 December 1826, trainee American soldiers at West Point Military Academy rioted after drinking too much eggnog. Worried by increasing drunkenness among the academy's cadets, the authorities had stipulated that the Christmas eggnog had to be alcohol-free, but some cadets smuggled in whisky and rum to fortify it. The consequence was more than 24 hours of bad behaviour, including fighting, the firing of guns and the breaking of glass. Twenty men were court-martialled for participating in the Eggnog Riot. **H**

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

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Was Mansa Musa the richest man ever?

It's impossible to know this for certain. However, here is what the historical sources do tell us: in 1324, Mansa Musa, ruler of the medieval Mali empire, which stretched across west Africa (not to be confused with today's Mali), set off on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, two holy cities of Islam.

He undertook a lengthy trip across the Sahara, journeying from the banks of the Niger river towards the Nile and Red Sea. His party included thousands of soldiers and hundreds of enslaved people carrying salt, gold and other riches. During his trip he stopped in Cairo, where he reportedly injected so much gold into the local economy that the metal's value dropped throughout Egypt, earning him his reputation as the richest man of all time.

Mansa Musa's spectacular pilgrimage signalled to the world the capabilities of a powerful west African state, and the aspirations of its ambitious ruler. In the pilgrimage's wake, the cities of Timbuktu and Jenne in Mali grew into major

hubs for the trade in humans, commodities, natural resources and books, welcoming local scholars and intellectuals from throughout the Islamic world.

Mansa Musa's fortune was certainly colossal by any historical or contemporary standards. However, numbers floating around estimating it in hundreds of billions of today's dollars are pure speculation. Moreover, these sky-high estimates obscure the fact that there remains a lot that scholars don't know about the economy, politics and organisation of the empire.

Madina Thiam, doctoral candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles, who specialises in Mali and the Sahel

Whisky-and-rum-spiked eggnog led to violence at West Point Military Academy in 1826



THE ART OF TREASON

A painting of Elizabeth Stuart, sister of Charles I, could have sent its owner to the Tower. **Nadine Akkerman** investigates this potentially treasonous work, and the woman who inspired it



Queen of England in waiting?

This portrait, painted during the reign of Charles I, is the product of an attempt to depict Elizabeth Stuart as “Elizabeth II”, writes Nadine Akkerman



A treasonous portrait

While I was working on an exhibition in the Netherlands a decade ago, curator Jan Peeters showed me a painting of Elizabeth Stuart – but, at the time, I didn't grasp its deadly significance. It shows

Elizabeth, daughter of King James VI and I and elder sister to Charles I, wearing an ermine robe and crown. Peeters believed that the crown – added to an earlier painting by a second artist – was the same one that had been lost by Charles I during the Civil Wars, broken up and sold for scrap by parliament. This crown, the so-called Tudor Crown, was the crown of England.

I only got an idea of how potentially explosive this portrait may have been when my research revealed that Elizabeth had been seen as a serious contender for England's throne. To commission or own a painting of the Stuart princess wearing this crown would be to risk an accusation of treason.

The scope of what could be considered treason was intentionally broad. When Edward III introduced the Treason Act in 1351, he defined the act as one that included the mere imagining of the king's death, as well as the occasioning of actual physical harm. When Henry VIII amended the Act in the 1530s, he added writing or speaking of harming the king, depriving him of his title, slandering his marriage or even cuckolding him to the behaviours now considered as treason.

This allowed evidence to take many forms, so that when Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, was put on trial in 1572 for plotting to usurp Elizabeth I with Mary, Queen of Scots, her gift to him of an embroidered cushion (shown right) was exhibit one. The needlepoint image of a blade cutting a barren tree branch to allow new roots to spring was enough to lose him his head. Mary, of course, damned herself in writing, but in a society that accorded such importance to visual rhetoric, it is hard to believe that the portrait of Elizabeth Stuart that comprised no mere emblem, but a contender blatantly wearing the crown, could not be taken as evidence of treason. Add a few overheard conversations and some coincidental political manoeuvring, and that prize portrait might have resulted in the owner's execution.

Touted for the throne

Who was Elizabeth, a woman who inspired such devotion that her supporters took this risk? The granddaughter of Mary, Queen of Scots, she is one of the 17th century's most underestimated figures. She was first seriously considered as a potential successor to the



Protestant power couple Portraits of Elector Palatine Frederick V and his wife Elizabeth Stuart, who briefly ruled as king and queen of Bohemia before being forced into exile



Damning evidence This embroidery – on a cushion given by Mary, Queen of Scots, to Thomas Howard – was used as proof of treason in his trial. Could Elizabeth Stuart's portrait have provoked a similar charge?



Royal additions

The portrait of Elizabeth Stuart with the Tudor Crown (above right) is a composite work, that is, a picture to which several details have later been added. Its base is a 1630–31 portrait, of which several versions circulated (including the one shown above left). The clearest sign of this work being composite is the rather awkward placement of her bejewelled hairpin.

On the image above right, the artist has also added the crown and the ermine robe. The latter was traditionally worn by royalty for their coronation, but it is the crown that is the portrait's true focus. With its jewel-encrusted headband, alternating cross and fleur-de-lys motif, and the four arms rising to support the single orb and cross at the apex, this is no ordinary accoutrement. It is thought to be the Tudor Crown: its design is identical to that featured in coins struck during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James VI & I and Charles I.



ENGLISH AND SCOTS ALIKE FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ELIZABETH WOULD NOT ONE DAY RETURN AS THEIR QUEEN

crowns of England, Scotland and Ireland when her beloved elder brother Henry died of typhoid in 1612. The younger Charles was still fragile and sickly.

While her subsequent marriage to the Calvinist Frederick V, Elector Palatine, one of the most powerful princes of the Holy Roman Empire, took her to Heidelberg, the capital of the Lower Palatinate in Germany, it also made them European Protestantism's new power couple. By 1621, they had challenged the emperor, been crowned king and queen of Bohemia, deposed, stripped of their German lands and titles, and exiled to the Dutch Republic. Nevertheless, English and Scots alike found it hard to believe that she would not one day return as their queen. If the sturdy Henry could die, Charles most certainly would.

A perilous journey

Matters almost came to a head in the 1620s when the Stuart kingdoms divided over the "Spanish Match", the plan for Charles to marry the Catholic Infanta Maria Anna of

A treasonous portrait

Haven at The Hague

This 1620s painting shows a cavalcade with Elizabeth Stuart on a white horse, alongside her husband's cousins, the Princes of Orange-Nassau



Spain. It was no secret that Elizabeth hated the Spanish, whom she called “the scurvie Dons”, and that she abhorred the match, allegedly greeting the death of King Philip III in 1621 with the hope that “all his race suffer the same fate, especially the female [part of it]”. (It was largely the Spanish who had besieged her husband’s ancestral lands and castles in Germany).

In 1623, Charles and his court favourite, the Duke of Buckingham, made the perilous – and ultimately fruitless – journey to Madrid to seal the deal. As they did so, the Venetian ambassador in England, Alvisе Vallaresso, advised his superiors that if Charles were to die en route, Elizabeth would become heir. He added that, when compared to the prince, she was “physically nearer this people and certainly much nearer their hearts”.

Elizabeth’s popularity resulted from her militant Protestantism and her fearlessness. She was skilled with bow and arquebus (a type of long gun), she hunted regularly, spearing boars from horseback even when

pregnant. Such was her charisma that even Scottish Catholics were drawn to her cause.

This made Elizabeth dangerous. More belligerent than her father or brother, she repeatedly advocated war over diplomacy, exhorting Buckingham to “pray tell the king [her father] that the enemy will more regard his blows than his words”. Her connection to Elizabeth I, her godmother, also played a part, as many saw her as the late queen’s natural heir or even reincarnation. The princess bought into the mythos, wearing the Virgin Queen’s jewellery and copying her curling signature.

Mistress in England?

It was an open secret that much of England wanted Elizabeth as queen. In Florence, a Venetian diplomat reported that Charles’s purported match was causing such disaffection within the Stuart kingdoms that if Elizabeth “should go there from Holland, the king [James VI & I] would to Scotland and she would be left mistress in England”. If the

correspondence of her friends is to be believed, Elizabeth clearly considered this option. “For God’s sake,” Lady Bedford begged Sir Dudley Carleton, ambassador to the Dutch Republic in The Hague, “preach more wariness to the Queen whom she uses freedom to, else she will undo her selfe.” In reporting Elizabeth’s designs, Vallaresso noted (in cipher) that if she “had the courage and wisdom to do so in a fitting manner it would probably be the best course she could pursue, though bold”.

However, Elizabeth never did move to take the throne. Widowed in 1632, she found herself at the epicentre of the Thirty Years’ War, the conflict that rocked Europe from 1618–48, and which was partially ignited by her husband’s support of Protestant rebels, his acceptance of the Bohemian crown and his later refusal to abdicate. Free from her brother’s stifling influence in her voluntary exile, Elizabeth was a major belligerent in the conflict, and she waged a fierce epistolary campaign to persuade her supporters to retake her lands by force.



SHE DID NOT LIVE TO SEE HER GREATEST TRIUMPH: HER GRANDSON GEORGE'S ELEVATION TO KING OF GREAT BRITAIN

As her brother's kingdoms later became embroiled in civil war, Elizabeth's court in The Hague would attract hundreds of royalist refugees. That the popularity of the so-called "Queen of Hearts" never faded perhaps explains why Charles II did not invite his aunt to his coronation in 1661.

Children and monkeys

The popularity Elizabeth enjoyed in the 17th century has not been passed down through the centuries. She is now known in historiography as "The Winter Queen", a pejorative derived from Catholic propaganda denigrating the brevity of their reign in Bohemia, which actually lasted for a full year rather than the assumed single season. She also stands accused of being a bad mother who preferred the company of her monkeys (of which she had several in her menagerie) to her children, and a spendthrift obsessed with the theatre who showed little interest in politics. None of these commonplaces bear scrutiny.

She was fiercely loyal to her subjects and those she loved, writing of her husband:

"I am resolved never to leave him, for if he perishes I too will perish with him."

She had to be dragged out of Prague following defeat at the battle of White Mountain, and undertook her flight across Bohemia and Germany while eight months pregnant and cradling her son Rupert (she did not

almost leave him behind, as Catholic pamphlets suggest). Her supporters repaid her with their own loyalty: "Misery with her sacred Majestie," wrote one soldier, "[is] a

thinge farr exceeding any blisse els... I am ever [what] the Queene will commaund me to be."

As for her being a spendthrift, Elizabeth kept accounts from the age of seven, and in 1660 she refused to leave The Hague until her debts had all been settled. While she struggled to run her court within her means, she rarely received the pensions promised by the Stuart crown, and spent not for her own pleasure, but to keep up appearances. If she wanted support in retaking Frederick's ancestral lands, it was important that she looked like royalty.

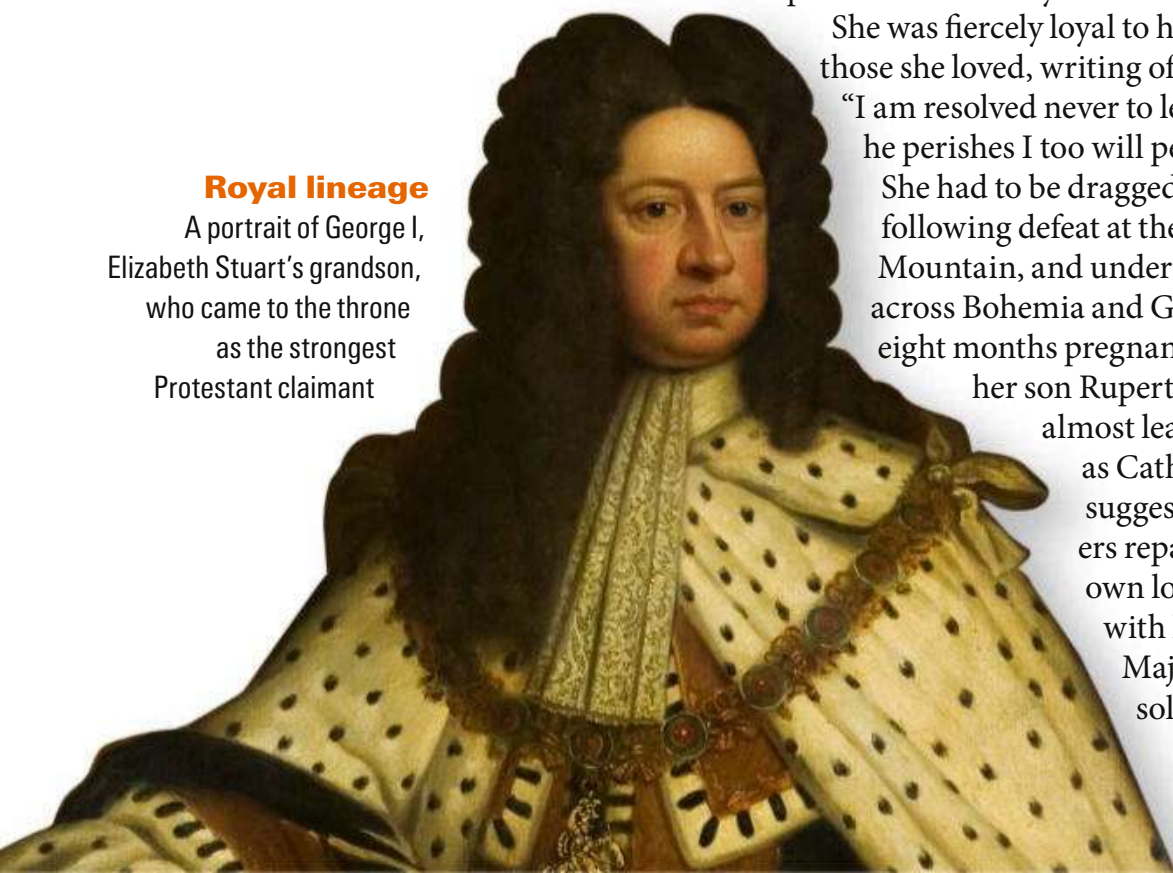
Her interest in plays, and especially masques, was born from their importance as political tools as she continued to explore every avenue in her efforts to regain the Palatinate for her children and find them suitable partners in marriage or military positions. Before her death in 1662, she would see one of her five daughters, Elisabeth, influence the development of René Descartes' philosophy; two of her eight sons, Rupert and Maurice, earn fame on the battlefield; and the partial restoration of the Palatinate. She would not live to see perhaps her greatest triumph, her grandson George's elevation to king of Great Britain in 1714.

Painted almost a century before George's coronation, the portrait of Elizabeth wearing the Tudor Crown was indeed potentially treasonous. Though it was most likely meant not to be widely viewed, it made concrete a long-standing feeling that Elizabeth was the warrior queen that England, Scotland and Europe's Protestants truly craved during the century's darkest times.

When Charles I did marry a Catholic bride, the French Henrietta Maria, and she bore him a male heir in 1630, voices of discontent were raised once more. The Stuart succession was secure, but many continued to wish Elizabeth as their queen, and were not backward about showing "their sorrow at the birth of the prince because of her". It was not long after that Elizabeth sat for the portrait that would later be manipulated to display her as Elizabeth II. **H**

Royal lineage

A portrait of George I, Elizabeth Stuart's grandson, who came to the throne as the strongest Protestant claimant



Nadine Akkerman is a reader in early modern English literature at Leiden University. Her latest book is *Elizabeth Stuart: Queen of Hearts* (OUP, 2021). She will be discussing Elizabeth Stuart on our podcast: HistoryExtra.com/podcast

LISTEN

To hear more about the marriage of Elizabeth Stuart, tune in to this episode of BBC Radio 3 series **The Early Music Show**: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qqf4c



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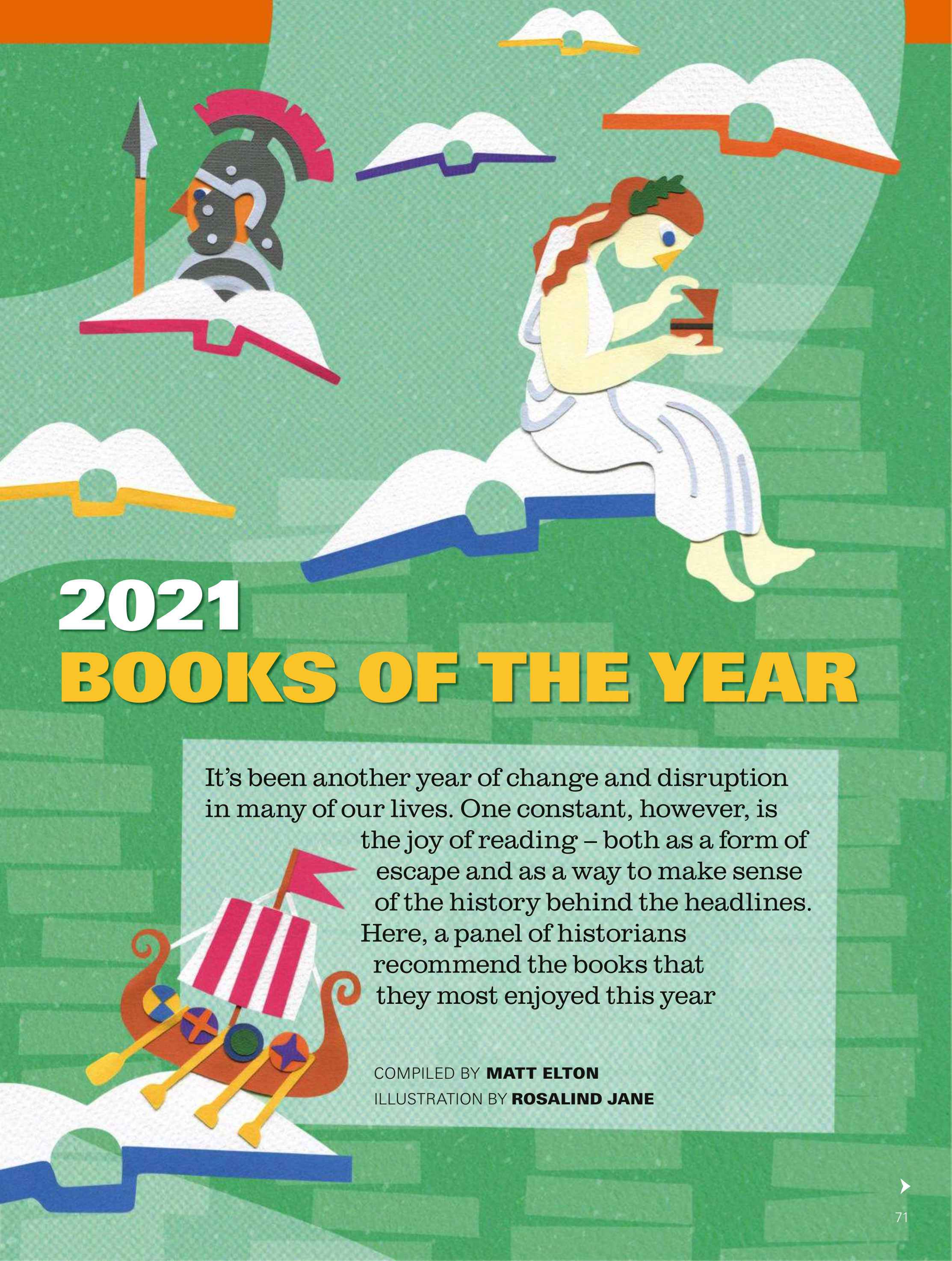


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2021 BOOKS OF THE YEAR

It's been another year of change and disruption in many of our lives. One constant, however, is the joy of reading – both as a form of escape and as a way to make sense of the history behind the headlines. Here, a panel of historians recommend the books that they most enjoyed this year

COMPILED BY **MATT ELTON**

ILLUSTRATION BY **ROSALIND JANE**



Tracy Borman



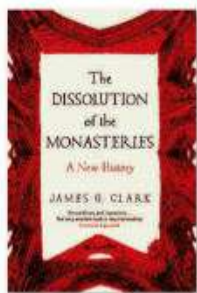
Just when we think we know everything about the Tudors, along comes a book that turns that all on its head. Reading Sarah Gristwood's *The Tudors in Love: The Courtly Code Behind the Last Medieval Dynasty* (Oneworld) feels like being given

the cypher to decode the letters between Mary, Queen of Scots and her Catholic conspirators. For the first time, there are satisfying answers to such conundrums as why Henry VIII took six wives and why the male favourites of Elizabeth I worshipped her as a goddess, even in her old age. The prose is as seductive as the subject matter. Be prepared to fall in love.



Staying in the Tudor age, the celebrated painter Hans Holbein brought Henry VIII and his courtiers to life, and his startlingly realistic portrayals still give us insights into their character as well as their

appearance. Yet the man himself has, for the most part, remained a shadowy figure. Franny Moyle puts this right in her stunning biography, *The King's Painter: The Life and Times of Hans Holbein* (Apollo), which evokes the painter and his world as vividly as a Holbein masterpiece. As well as propounding theories about his best-known works, she presents him as a true polymath.



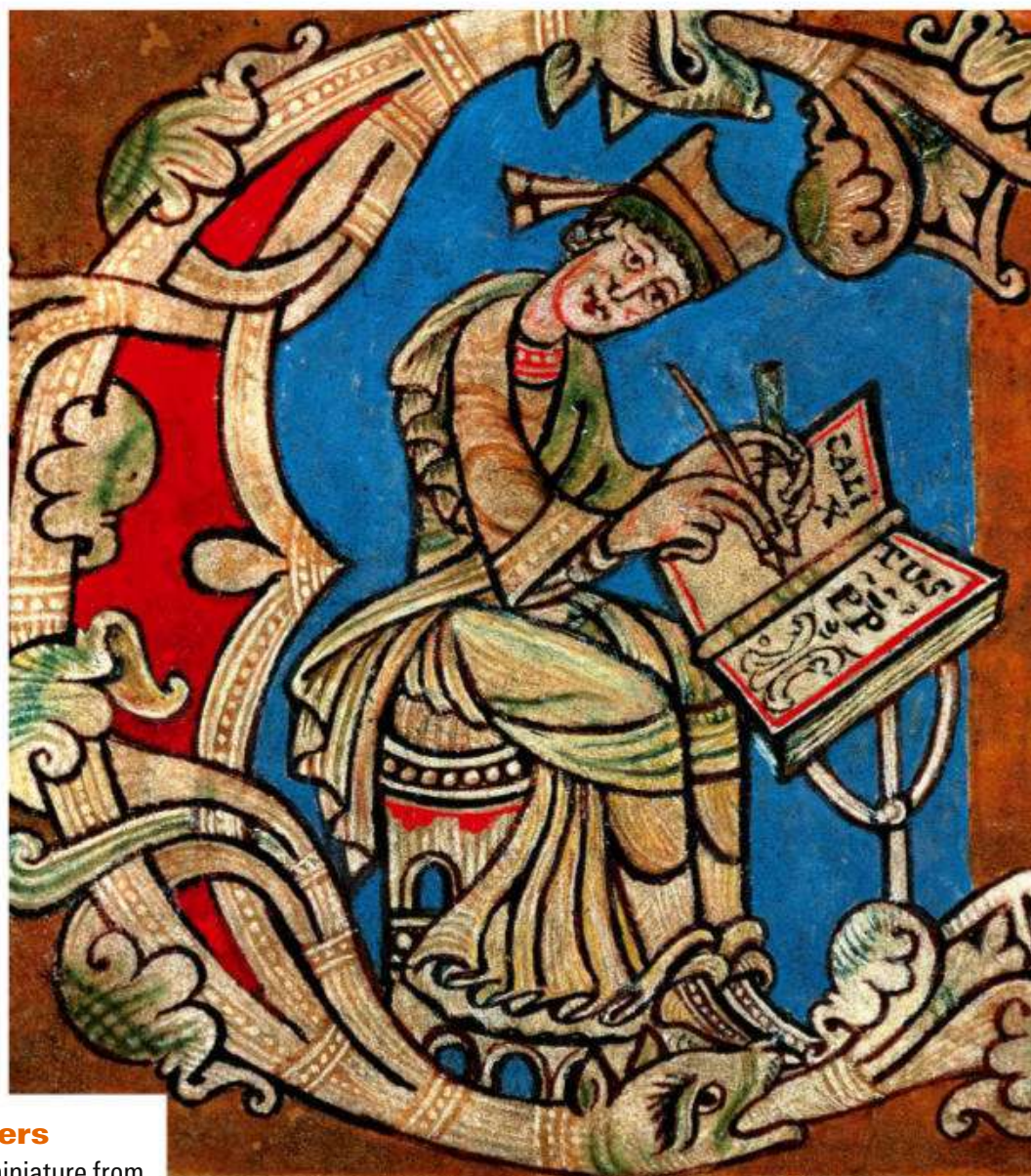
Finally, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: A New History* (Yale University Press) by James Clark is an impressively detailed study that yields a rich harvest. Clark has unearthed a wealth of overlooked

details to challenge centuries of controversy and misconception, and provides a welcome new perspective on Henry VIII, his "henchman" Thomas Cromwell and other powerful members of the court, as well as the people whose lives were forever blighted by the destruction they wrought.

.....
Tracy Borman is a historian and author, whose books include *Crown & Sceptre: A New History of the British Monarchy* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2021)



Pottery and politics A jasperware plaque by Josiah Wedgwood. Andrew Roberts hails Tristram Hunt's profile of the ceramicist and campaigner as "a remarkable book from a historian at the top of his game"



Men of letters

An illuminated miniature from a 12th-century manuscript. Mary Wellesley's *Hidden Hands* traces the stories of such documents and the individuals who made them

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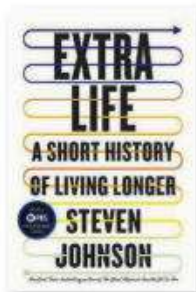


Simon Sebag Montefiore



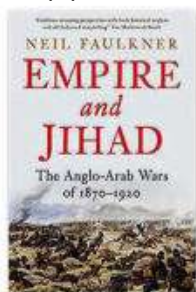
The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind (Yale) by Jan Lucassen is a brilliant, magisterial multi-millennial tour de force of world history from Sumerian villages to today's iPhones.

Filled with fascinating ideas and facts, it's essential reading for our strange times.



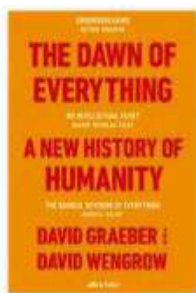
Steven Johnson provides a gripping and lucid history of how, in a century, humans have cured epidemics, elongated life and reduced child mortality in **Extra Life: A Short History of Living**

Longer (Riverhead). As much a tale of campaigners, philanthropists and activists as genius scientists, his account is full of original thinking. It promises to change the way you see life itself today.



Then there's Neil Faulkner's superb, compelling and exuberantly written history of Britain's Arab Wars in **Empire and Jihad: The Anglo-Arab Wars of 1870-1920** (Yale).

It's filled with fascinating but sensitive portraits and cliché-busting, balanced analysis. Radical but nuanced, Faulkner changes the way we think about the subject, and is as damning of the Mahdist rebels as Victorian empire builders.



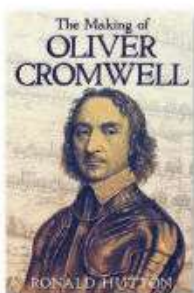
The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity (Allen Lane) by David Graeber and David Wengrow is a spectacular, flashy and groundbreaking retelling of human history, blazing with iconoclastic

rebuttals to conventional wisdom. Full of fresh thinking, it's a pleasure to read and offers a bracing challenge on every page.

Simon Sebag Montefiore is a historian, author and broadcaster. His books include *Written in History: Letters that Changed the World* (2018) and *The Romanovs 1613-1918* (2016, both W&N)



Andrew Roberts



The Making of Oliver Cromwell (Yale) had me spellbound. Ronald Hutton weaves a convincing story of the rise of Cromwell from an extraordinarily slender number of sources. The way in which he weighs

the evidence for each theory about the young Cromwell exhibits the finest aspects of the historian's profession. Similarly, he makes a strategically confusing civil war easily comprehensible. The product of a lifetime's study, the book has changed my view of the Lord Protector. I am panting for the second volume.



Simon Elliott's **Roman Britain's Missing Legion: What Really Happened to IX Hispana?** (Pen & Sword) is a detective-style whodunnit that aims to discover the fate of the legendary Ninth Legion

(Legio IX Hispana) after AD 108. Was it lost on the Rhine, or in the east of the empire, or in Caledonia (as Rosemary Sutcliff posits in her novel *The Eagle of the Ninth*)? I won't spoil it by telling you what Elliott reveals, but he explains things satisfactorily, while also leaving open a few loose ends and doubts.



The Radical Potter: Josiah Wedgwood and the Transformation of Britain (Allen Lane) sees Tristram Hunt argue that Wedgwood was epicentral to the transformation of Britain in the late 18th and

early 19th centuries. A truly astonishing combination of inventor, entrepreneur, artist and promoter, Wedgwood somehow managed to be "Potter to Her Majesty" Queen Charlotte, while also a supporter of both the American and French Revolutions. This is a remarkable book from a historian at the top of his game.

Andrew Roberts is the author of *George III: The Life and Reign of Britain's Most Misunderstood Monarch* (Allen Lane, 2021). He will be speaking about the book on 16 December as part of our virtual lecture series. To find out more and book tickets, visit historyextra.com/events



Suzannah Lipscomb



Nadine Akkerman's **Elizabeth Stuart: Queen of Hearts** (Oxford University Press) is an extraordinary biography of a much-maligned and much-forgotten queen. Elizabeth Stuart was

the daughter of James VI and I, sister to Charles I, and Queen of Bohemia as wife to Frederick V, Elector Palatine. Akkerman knows her archive as few have ever done, and demonstrates how to resurrect an early modern woman. [See Nadine Akkerman's feature about Elizabeth Stuart starting on page 62.]



Mary Wellesley's **Hidden Hands: The Lives of Manuscripts and Their Makers** (Riverrun) is a gorgeously written debut work from a historian of great talent. In it, we encounter the "alchemy

of parchment": the manuscripts that make the dead speak to us as if they were yet alive. It's an exquisite meditation on the role of chance, the obscurity of individuals, and the nature of history itself.



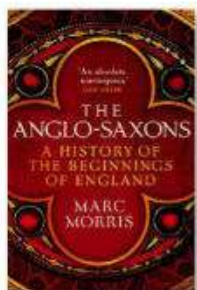
Malcolm Gaskill's **The Ruin of All Witches: Life and Death in the New World** (Allen Lane) is simply one of the best history books that I have ever read. It tells the story of a confessed witch who

accused her husband of the same crime in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1651 – four decades before the famous witch trials in Salem. Gaskill vividly depicts life in early colonial New England and brilliantly uses witness depositions to piece together a thrilling narrative. His deeply imaginative, empathetic and yet empirical exploration of a past moment of crisis is history at its finest.

Suzannah Lipscomb is a historian, author and broadcaster, whose recent books include *The Voices of Nîmes: Women, Sex, and Marriage in Reformation Languedoc* (Oxford, 2019). She is also co-editor, with Helen Carr, of *What Is History, Now?* (W&N, 2021)

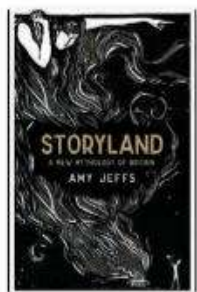


Helen Carr



The Anglo-Saxons: A New History of the Beginnings of England by Marc Morris (Hutchinson) is a sweeping but detailed analysis of the Anglo-Saxons over a period of six centuries. Morris explores

the art, architecture, religion and politics of the people who populated much of Britain after the Romans left. This period is often called the “Dark Ages”, but, by illuminating the creative, martial and societal achievements of these people, and in his reinvigoration of characters of the period – whether real or legendary – Morris shines a fresh light on the Anglo-Saxon age as the epoch of medieval history.



Reading Amy Jeffs’ ***Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain*** (Riverrun) feels like listening to a bard orate mystical stories of the world that was. Erudite and lyrical, Jeffs takes readers by

the hand and encourages us to join her as she guides us through the mystical landscape that is indelibly woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. This book will make you stick your walking shoes on and get outside to breathe in the history of this ancient land.



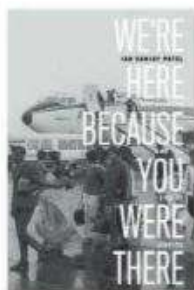
From the 15th-century writings of Italian poet and author Christine de Pizan to present-day writers such as bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, ***The Penguin Book of Feminist Writing***

(Penguin), edited by Hannah Dawson, rounds up the voices of women from across history to discuss the meaning and practice of feminism. This is a book that every person should read: the multiplicity of voices from various times and spaces allows women of the past alongside women of the present to be noisy about why feminism matters. It is a collective masterpiece.

Helen Carr is the author of *The Red Prince: The Life of John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster* (OneWorld, 2021) and co-editor, with Suzannah Lipscomb, of *What Is History, Now?* (W&N, 2021)

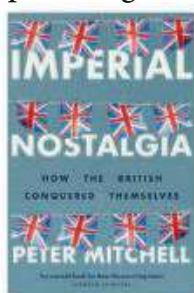


Sathnam Sanghera



In 1948, the British parliament did an extraordinary thing: it passed a law enacting what had been true for decades – that anyone born in the empire had the rights of a British citizen.

The legislation formally granted 600 million people from across the planet the right to emigrate to Britain. That was far more than the number of white people living in Britain, and around 10 times today’s British population. In ***We’re Here Because You Were There: Immigration and the End of Empire*** (Verso), Ian Sanjay Patel explains what happened between this moment and the Windrush scandal, when British citizens of colour found themselves being deported to nations they didn’t know. It is the best possible guide to an essential history.



At times, it can feel that the culture wars aimed at sowing division in Britain are going to tear us apart. Peter Mitchell’s fantastic ***Imperial Nostalgia: How the British Conquered Themselves***

(Manchester University Press), however, provides grounds for optimism and teaches us that the answer is to be informed – and there is no more erudite guide than Mitchell.

Sathnam Sanghera is a journalist and author of books including *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain* (Viking, 2021)

A new chapter

Passengers from the *Empire Windrush* arrive in Tilbury, 1948. Sathnam Sanghera praises a new take on 20th-century history that places immigration front and centre



Light on to darkness

A stained glass window at York Minster telling the story of Anglo-Saxon saint Cuthbert. Marc Morris’s latest book reveals the era’s key individuals



Looking backwards

A sailor repairs a figurehead on Nelson’s ship *Britannia*, 1936. Peter Mitchell’s book charts Britain’s fascination with its imperial era

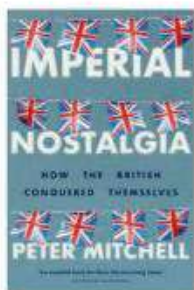


Fearless feminism

African-American women's rights activist Sojourner Truth, whose writing is included in a new book of feminist thought hailed by Helen Carr as a "collective masterpiece"



Alex von Tunzelmann



As Sathnam did, I loved Peter Mitchell's *Imperial Nostalgia: How the British Conquered Themselves* (Manchester University Press). It's a thoughtful, sharp exploration of how the historical memory of the British empire still pervades and informs the nation's culture today. Mitchell's analysis is sophisticated, yet his prose is extremely readable. The ultimate message of the book is hopeful: that prejudices and misplaced assumptions about the past can be and are being remedied by the work of public history.



Ada Ferrer's *Cuba: An American History* (Scribner) is an epic, gripping account of the unique island nation, from before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the 21st century. Ferrer puts Cuba's troubled relationship with the United States at the centre of her narrative, which makes her book enlightening for scholars of both nations. Since I wrote my book *Red Heat: Conspiracy, Murder and the Cold War in the Caribbean* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), I've often been asked to recommend an accessible book on the longer history of Cuba. I'm delighted to have found one that is so intelligent, so nuanced and so thoroughly researched.



I've been enraptured by *What Is History, Now?* (W&N), a collection of essays edited by Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb. They have put together a diverse and distinguished selection of voices to update the discussion of history started by Carr's great-grandfather, EH Carr. (I have an essay in it too, but please don't let that put you off!) Many of the chapters have spurred me to broaden and deepen my own perspective in aspects of history which I haven't always considered.

Alex von Tunzelmann is a historian and screenwriter. Her most recent book is *Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues That Made History* (Headline, 2021)

BESTSELLERS

Waterstones' 10 bestselling history books of the year so far

1 **Operation Pedestal: The Fleet that Battled to Malta 1942**

by Max Hastings (William Collins)

2 **Ancestors: A Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials**

by Alice Roberts (Simon & Schuster)

3 **The Anglo-Saxons: A History of the Beginnings of England**

by Marc Morris (Hutchinson)

4 **Barbarossa: How Hitler Lost the War**

by Jonathan Dimbleby (Viking)

5 **Powers and Thrones: A New History of the Middle Ages**

by Dan Jones (Apollo)

6 **Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain**

by Sathnam Sanghera (Viking)

7 **Tornado: In the Eye of the Storm**

by John Nichol (Simon & Schuster)

8 **Letters to Camondo**

by Edmund de Waal (Chatto & Windus)

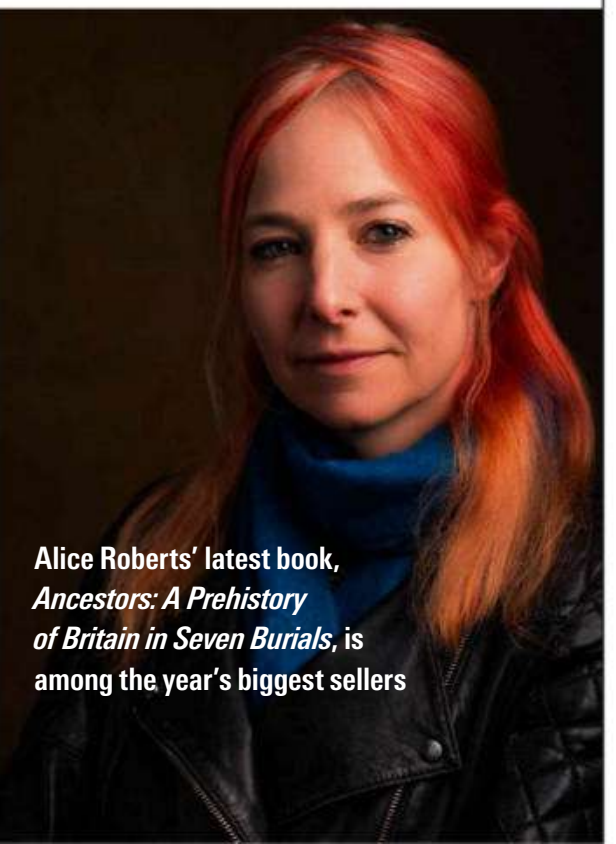
9 **The Bomber Mafia: A Story Set in War**

by Malcolm Gladwell (Allen Lane)

10 **Unwell Women: A Journey through Medicine and Myth in a Man-Made World**

by Elinor Cleghorn (W&N)

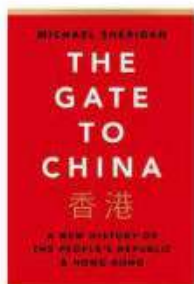
Accurate at time of printing



Alice Roberts' latest book, *Ancestors: A Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials*, is among the year's biggest sellers

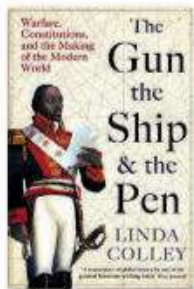


Rana Mitter



Michael Sheridan's *The Gate to China: A New History of the People's Republic and Hong Kong* (William Collins) takes one of the biggest stories of the last year – the Chinese crackdown on Hong

Kong's freedoms of speech and assembly – and places it in historical context. Sheridan's gripping, richly researched history sheds a highly critical light on those British officials of the Thatcher era who seemed to favour Beijing's autocracy over the promotion of liberal values, and movingly recounts the brief hopes of Hong Kong's reformers whose democratic enlightenment has turned to darkness.



Liberal reform also plays a central role in Linda Colley's lucid and erudite *The Gun, the Ship and the Pen* (Profile), which shows how constitutional reform went hand in hand with conflict to create

a modern imperial world. Constitutions brought law and new freedoms around the globe, but they also marginalised many groups, including women and people of colour. One of the most fascinating elements is Colley's take on how Japan's Meiji Constitution inspired reform in many parts of the late 19th century non-western world, including Turkey and China.



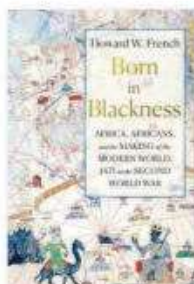
The history of a historian is at the heart of a deeply compelling story about the making of our own times. Sheila Rowbotham is a pioneer of women's history, and her new book *Daring to Hope: My Life in the*

1970s (Verso) uses her own experiences as a framework for explaining an era of sweeping social change. From inspiring cleaners to unionise, to bringing socialism and feminism together through the writing of a new kind of social history, Rowbotham's humanity and craft shines through.

Rana Mitter is professor of history at the University of Oxford. His books include *China's Good War* (Belknap, 2020)



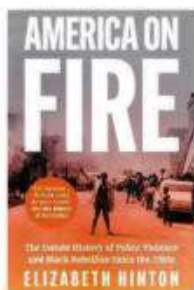
Olivette Otele



Histories of transatlantic enslavement taught in schools in Europe and North America have tended to start with European traders and sea captains. Shifting our gaze, *Born in Blackness: Africa, Africans, and the Making of the Modern World, 1471 to the Second World War* (Liveright) by Howard W French challenges us to rethink the birthplace and premise of debates about modernity. Impeccably written and highly stimulating, it engages with centuries of world history and places people of African descent at its heart.



Staying in Africa, Max Siollun's *What Britain Did to Nigeria: A Short History of Conquest and Rule* (C Hurst & Co) focuses on colonisation. Siollun disentangles the complex political and economic knots of colonial administration and their consequences on Nigeria's societal organisation. Laying a solid ground for understanding the dialogues, pushbacks and forced collaborations that are at play when communities are under duress, Siollun forces us to delve into the nuances that are an integral part of colonial histories.



Elizabeth Hinton's timely and disturbing *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s* (William Collins) tells the story of racial unrest and police brutality in the US since the 1960s. Hinton delves into the spiral of police violence and the ways in which it has been supported by the political arena, documenting how it has been ignited by black communities' demands for equality. Equally alarming were the ways in which peaceful socialising led to unsolicited police attention and harassment that inflamed the black population. Hard-hitting but essential.

Olivette Otele is a historian and professor of the history of slavery at the University of Bristol, and author of *African Europeans: An Untold History* (C Hurst & Co, 2020)



Rising discontent Nurses protest about public-sector pay, 1979. Sheila Rowbotham's memoir uses her own experiences to frame the era's changes



War and words

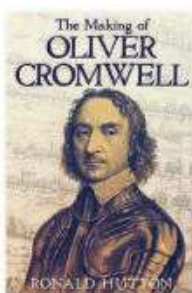
Japanese politician Kuroda Kiyotaka as portrayed in a c1876 woodblock print. Kuroda was a key figure in the drafting of the Meiji Constitution, whose impact Linda Colley charts in her new book

Brotherhood and brutality

A Sherman Firefly tank in Belgium, 1944. James Holland charts one tank regiment's Second World War story

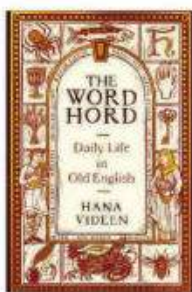


Tom Holland



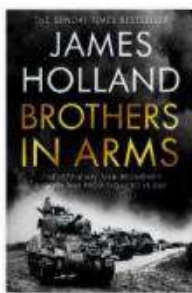
I loved Ronald Hutton's *The Making of Oliver Cromwell* (Yale): a biography that takes us from Cromwell's birth up to the end of the Civil War, and leaves us – tantalisingly – on the brink of his final

ascent to supreme power. As the Earl of Clarendon did before him, Hutton sees Cromwell as a “brave, bad man”, a figure at once devout and deeply dishonest. The drama is always vivid, with the 1644 battle of Marston Moor a particular highlight; the evocation of the changing seasons beautifully done. I can't wait for the second instalment.



Hana Videen's *The Wordhord: Daily Life in Old English* (Profile) is a wonderful book that blends linguistics with a survey of everyday life in Anglo-Saxon England. If you want to know why

music was known as *dream-craeft*, what was meant by *sawel-dreor* – “soul blood” – or the origins of our days of the week, then this is for you. It constitutes a veritable *leornung-hus*: a “learning house”.



My final choice for book of the year is the latest from James Holland. *Brothers in Arms: One Legendary Tank Regiment's Bloody War from D-Day to VE Day* (Bantam Press) tracks the

progress of a tank regiment, the Sherwood Rangers, from D-Day to the Second World War's dying days. Brilliantly researched and unsparingly detailed, it gives a portrayal of the Allied victory in Europe that I found revelatory. Certainly, I had no idea that the fighting had been quite so brutal. The book is simultaneously heart-stopping, panoramic and moving. And I am not saying that because James is my brother...

Tom Holland is an author whose most recent book is *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little, Brown, 2019). He is co-presenter, with Dominic Sandbrook, of the podcast *The Rest Is History*

LOOKING FORWARD

Deputy editor **Matt Elton** looks at some of the big history titles due in 2022

As the shifting publication dates of the past year demonstrate, it's harder than ever to guarantee precisely when the latest books will be released. Yet, with that caveat in mind, here's a preview of some of the history highlights set to hit bookshelves over the coming months.

British imperialism and the nation's role in the slave trade continue to be hot historical topics, and in *White Debt: The Demerara Uprising and Britain's Legacy of Slavery* (W&N, January) Thomas Harding blends research into his own ancestors' involvement in slavery with a wider look at how the nation should address the subject in 2022. We'll be speaking to Harding next issue. Meanwhile, in *Uncommon Wealth: Britain and the Aftermath of Empire* (John Murray, February), Kojo Koram considers whether the era of decolonisation can help us make sense of some of the challenges Britain has faced in the intervening decades.

For more escapist fare, *Tudor Roses: From Margaret Beaufort to Elizabeth I* (Amberley, February) by Amy Licence places women at the heart of the dynasty's story, profiling the ways in which figures such as Mary I and Margaret Beaufort shaped the world around them. Later in the year, Janina Ramirez promises to do the same for the medieval era in *Femina: A New History of the Middle Ages* (WH Allen, July).

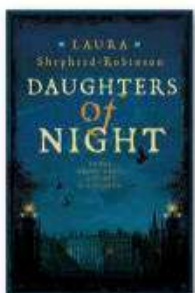
There will be many, many more titles besides, of course – and for interviews with the authors of the latest history books, visit historyextra.com/podcast.

Janina Ramirez puts the women of the Middle Ages first with her upcoming book, *Femina*



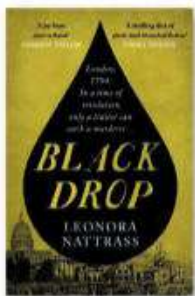


Nick Rennison selects this year's best historical fiction



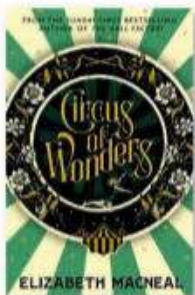
Excellent historical novels continue to be published in such numbers that coming up with a choice of just five is difficult – but all of the following succeed both in telling a gripping story and conjuring up the past.

Laura Shepherd-Robinson's *Daughters of Night* (Mantle) is a thriller set in 1780s London that opens with the discovery of a murdered woman in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The victim has been found by Caro Corsham, the spirited daughter of a banker, and she forms an unlikely alliance with investigator Peregrine Child to seek out the truth about the killing. However, events lead her into danger and a confrontation with her own family's darkest secrets.



Black Drop (Viper), Leonora Nattrass's hugely enjoyable debut novel, also takes place in the British capital, but a decade later, as the government gazes anxiously across the Channel at revolutionary

events in France. Foreign Office employee Laurence Jago stumbles into a world of treason and conspiracy when he discovers the body of a fellow clerk and begins to suspect up-and-coming politician George Canning of murder.

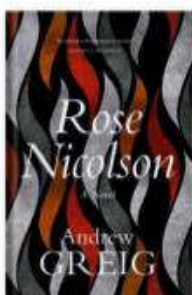


Elizabeth Macneal's successful debut of 2019, *The Doll Factory*, explored some of the odder corners of Victorian England, a milieu to which she returns in her second novel, *Circus of Wonders*

(Picador). Her heroine, Nell, is a country girl, singled out by the birthmarks that cover her skin, whose life is transformed when she is seen by travelling showman Jasper Jupiter. He whisks her off to London to join his show, where she becomes a daring aerialist. Soon, her fame eclipses his own. Nell's relationship with Jasper's brother, haunted by his experiences in the Crimean War, further complicates Macneal's plot.



High-flying careers Trapeze artists as portrayed in a lithograph. The experiences of one such aerial performer form the basis of Elizabeth Macneal's new novel, *Circus of Wonders*



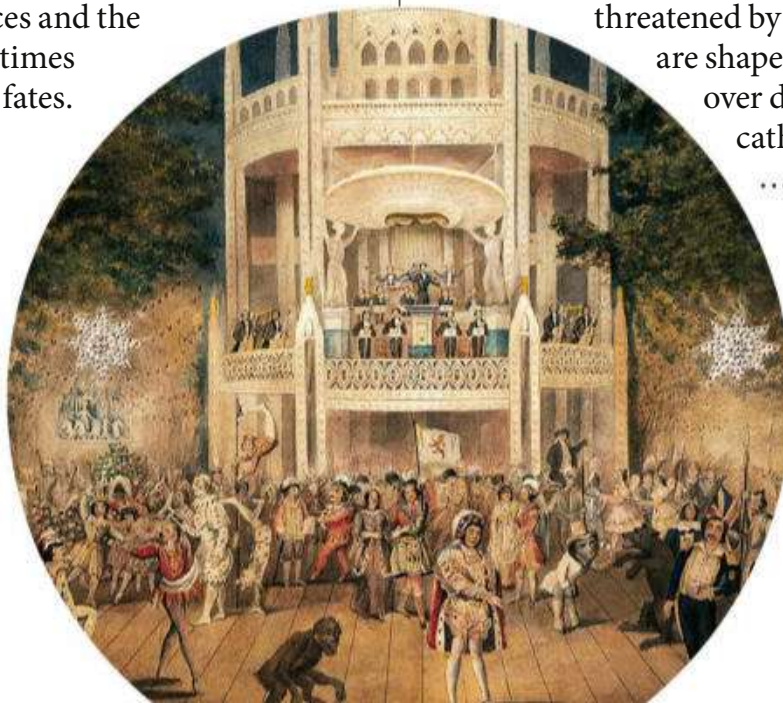
Another remarkable woman trapped by the circumstances of her birth gives her name to Andrew Greig's *Rose Nicolson* (Riverrun). As 16th-century Scotland is riven by religious and political divisions, student poet Will Fowler is drawn to the freethinking Rose, the daughter of an impoverished fishing family, but class differences and the turbulence of the times dictate both their fates.

Gathering darkness

An 18th-century watercolour of Vauxhall Gardens. Laura Shepherd-Robinson uses the London park as a setting in her novel *Daughters of Night*



Ben Hopkins' *Cathedral* (Europa Editions) is a powerful work of the imagination. One of the year's most ambitious and expansive novels, it's an epic story of life in an invented German city during the medieval period. The fortunes of Hopkins' many characters – from a visionary architect to a Jewish trader threatened by Gentile greed – are shaped by the building, over decades, of a new cathedral. **H**



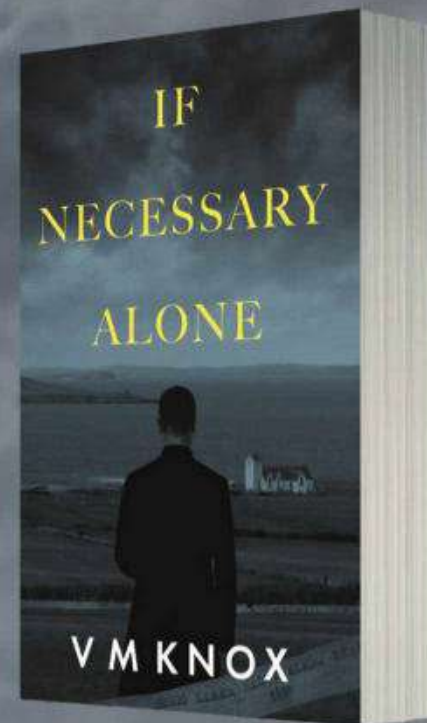
Nick Rennison

is the author of books including *Carver's Truth* (Corvus, 2016) and *1922: Scenes from a Turbulent Year* (Oldcastle Books, 2021)

Intrigue, Murder, Revenge and Embedded Nazi Spies



In Spite of All Terror is the first in a series of crime thrillers by V M Knox that mix historical fact, crime fiction and superb characterisation. Set in September 1940, when Britain stood alone against an imminent Nazi invasion, Reverend Clement Wisdom and other men from the restricted occupations, were called to join the covert Auxiliary Units. Following the murders of several of Clement's team, he finds himself embroiled in the murky world of espionage where things are never what they seem.

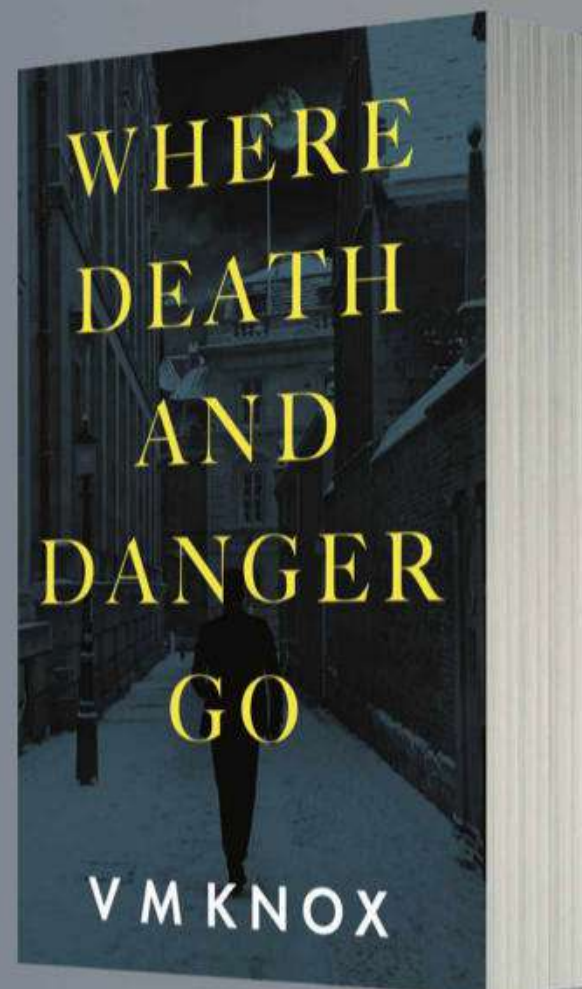


If Necessary Alone is the second thriller in this World War II crime series. Clement Wisdom, now a Major in Special Duties Branch, Secret Intelligence Service, is sent to remote Caithness to investigate illicit encrypted radio transmissions. As soon as he arrives there, an out-station wireless operator is found brutally murdered and Clement becomes entangled in a web of death and silence. Alone, and in the bitter Scottish winter, Clement must stay one step ahead of a killer if he is to remain alive.

Where Death and Danger Go is the third book in this World War II crime series. Set in the dark days of 1941, Britain fights on alone. Fear hangs in the air. Some yearn for peace and an end to the relentless Nazi bombing. Others are spurred on to fight. And some will manipulate a divided country for their own ends.

On a winter's night, a German spy parachutes into Cambridgeshire while another man is secretly murdered in the same field. Is he another enemy spy or has he been sent to his death? Either way, a killer lurks.

Major Clement Wisdom of Special Duties Branch of the SIS is sent to discover the dead man's identity and uncovers a sinister network of conspiracy where kidnap, murder and revenge threaten not only the safety of the nation but also Clement's life.



All three books can be purchased from online book sellers, Waterstones and independent book shops. Audiobooks for all three titles are now available.

Book 4 in the Clement Wisdom series out soon!



LISTEN

Women's war stories

Eighty years ago, in December 1941, parliament passed the National Service Act. This extended conscription to women – if they were aged between 20 and 30 and either childless widows or unmarried – for the first time. By VE Day, more than 190,000 women had served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), part of the British Army.

Many of these women are no longer with us, making it all the more important to collect the memories of veterans. A one-off documentary, presented by historian Tessa Dunlop, author of new book *Army Girls*, offers a picture of lives changed forever and, at a time of formidable class barriers, social norms being challenged on a daily basis.

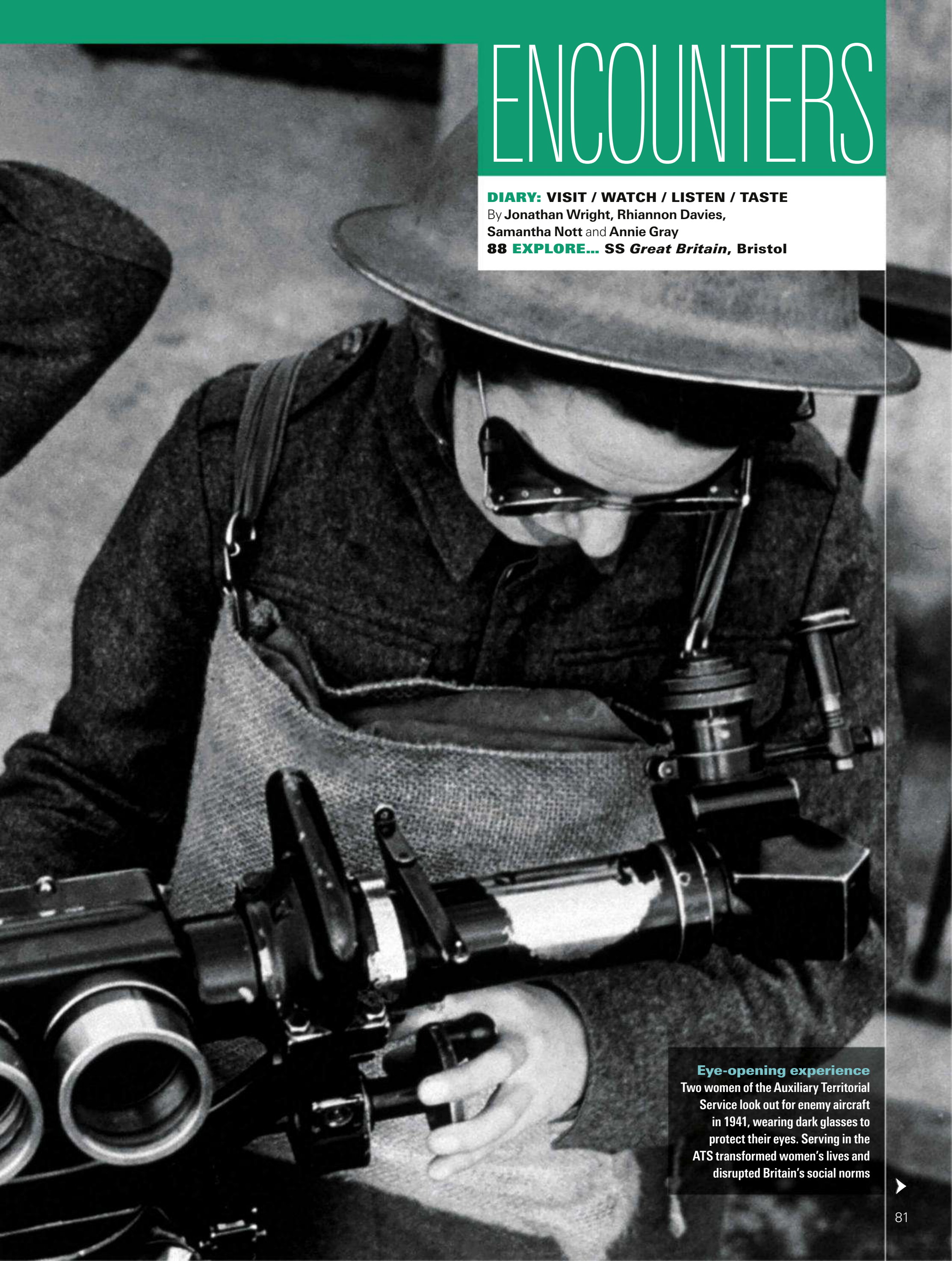
Initially, the work of the ATS (which had been formed in 1938) was seen as dreary, even demeaning, but that changed in 1941 when female soldiers were recruited to serve on anti-aircraft command gun sites. However, they weren't allowed to load or fire the guns, a reflection of 1940s social mores.

The documentary also reveals how the ATS women all too often had to fend off the unwanted attentions of their male colleagues.

The Army Girls

BBC Radio 4 / December

GETTY IMAGES



ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: VISIT / WATCH / LISTEN / TASTE

By Jonathan Wright, Rhiannon Davies,
Samantha Nott and Annie Gray

88 EXPLORE... *SS Great Britain, Bristol*

Eye-opening experience

Two women of the Auxiliary Territorial Service look out for enemy aircraft in 1941, wearing dark glasses to protect their eyes. Serving in the ATS transformed women's lives and disrupted Britain's social norms

A still from John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015). A "meditation on man's relationship with the sea", the film will be part of an eclectic new exhibition



VISIT

Rewriting the rules

By bringing together works of art from its extensive collection that spans 500 years and multiple disciplines, National Museum Cardiff is questioning the rules of art in its most ambitious exhibition yet. The display of paintings, drawings, sculptures, photographs, films and ceramics from numerous eras seeks to address what art means to identity, representation and culture. It also challenges the established hierarchy of different artforms,

which goes back to the French Academy in the 1600s. This saw historical paintings and portraits at the apex of style, whereas landscapes and still lifes were regarded as less impressive.

Works by Rembrandt, Pablo Picasso and Welsh artists Thomas Jones, Gwen John and Bedwyr Williams all feature.

The Rules of Art?

National Museum Cardiff / Until 16 April 2023 / Booking required / museum.wales

WATCH

Glamour and murder

The fall of the Gucci dynasty in the 1990s, which saw them leave their family fashion house, was a dark tale of financial problems, betrayal and murder. In director Ridley Scott's second historical film of 2021 – after *The Last Duel* – that drama is brought to life, based on Sara Gay Forden's book *The House of Gucci: A Sensational Story of Murder, Madness, Glamour, and Greed*.

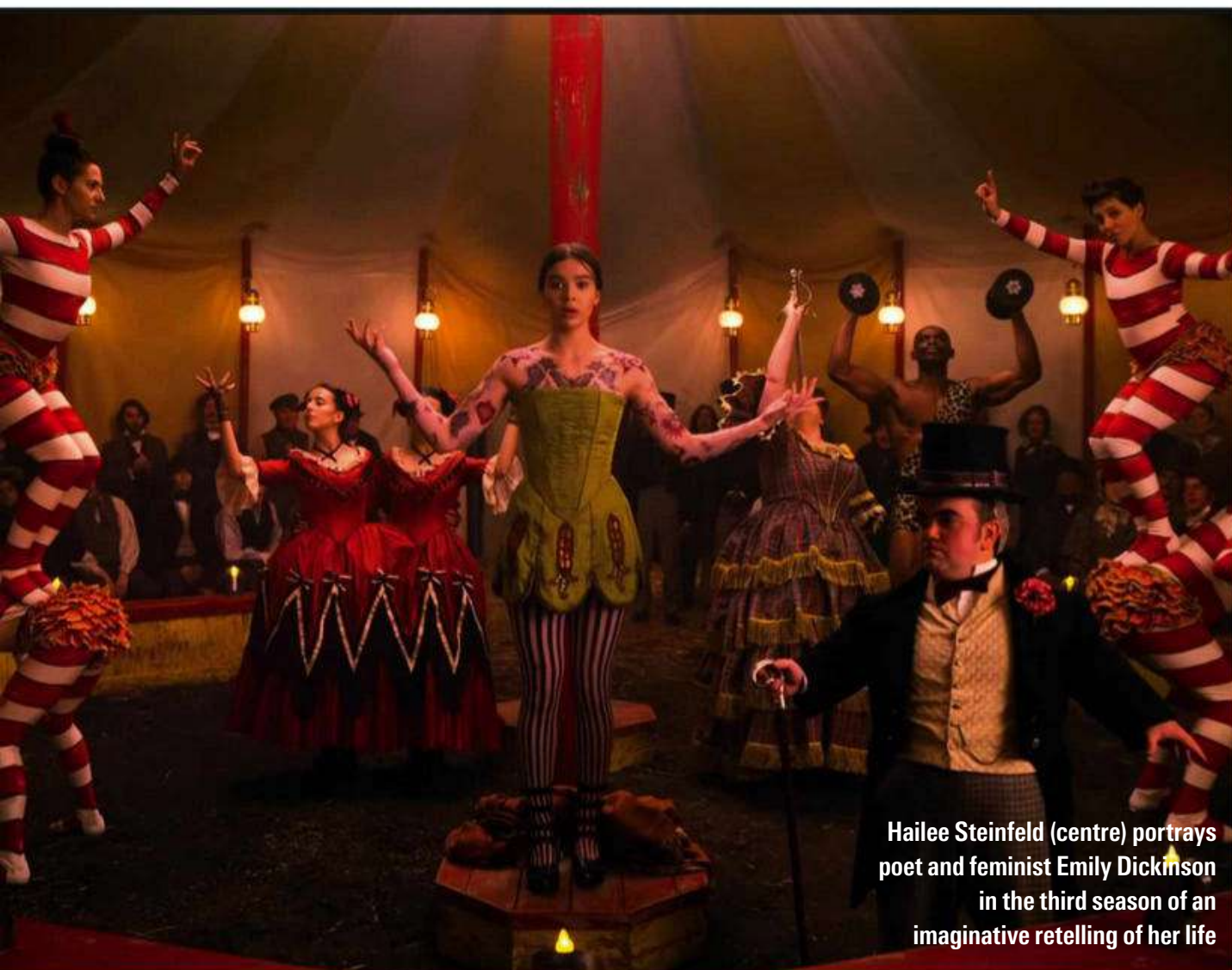
Lady Gaga leads the cast as the Italian socialite Patrizia Reggiani, who was tried for orchestrating the assassination of her ex-husband and former head of Gucci, Maurizio Gucci (Adam Driver). The star-studded cast also includes Jared Leto, Jeremy Irons, Salma Hayek and, as Aldo Gucci, chairman of Gucci from 1953–86, Al Pacino.



House of Gucci

In cinemas from 26 November

Adam Driver and Lady Gaga play Maurizio Gucci and his wife, Patrizia, who engineers his murder



Hailee Steinfeld (centre) portrays poet and feminist Emily Dickinson in the third season of an imaginative retelling of her life

WATCH

Period dress, modern manners

While set in the 19th century, *Dickinson* is anything but a historically accurate take on the life and times of Emily Dickinson (1830–86), a figure little heralded in her own lifetime and only posthumously recognised as one of America's most important writers.

Instead, the television series is a comedy that portrays Dickinson (played by Hailee Steinfeld) as an aspiring poet and forthright feminist, someone with a millennial's sensibility who can be relied upon to rail against the idiocy of those around her.

The third season, streaming now, is set against the backdrop of the American Civil War and shows Dickinson trying to bring peace to a family at loggerheads.

Dickinson

Apple TV+ / Streaming now with new episodes every Friday until Christmas Eve



A member of the Imperial Fascist League in the 1930s. A new exhibition explores fascism in interwar Europe

VISIT

Flourishing fascism

In the years after the First World War, fascism sprouted across Europe. The nationalist, rightwing ideology transformed politics and societies, with fascists taking to the streets of Italy, Germany and Austria to demand change. The movement snowballed, ultimately leading to the Nazis' programme of persecution and mass slaughter that reached its horrific height during the Second World War.

To better understand how fascism became such a strong political force, the Wiener Holocaust Library is delving into the growth of the ideology during the interwar period. Using its extensive archives, the exhibition shines a light on the experiences of rank-and-file fascists, considering what drove them to embrace the far right and how they furthered the fascist agenda.

This Fascist Life: Radical Right Movements in Interwar Europe

Wiener Holocaust Library, London / Until 4 February 2022 / wienerholocaustlibrary.org

WEEKLY TV & RADIO

Visit historyextra.com for weekly updates on upcoming television and radio programmes

HISTORY ON THE BOX

"She was brilliant – she raced camels, fought in inter-tribal warfare and had the respect of her adopted people"



LINDSAY DUNCAN (left), one of the stars of new BBC drama *Around the World in 80 Days*, discusses her role as aristocratic adventurer Jane Digby – a trailblazing woman who filled her life with travel, culture and romance

You guest-star as Jane Digby in an episode of a new drama based on Jules Verne's *Around the World In 80 Days*. Who was she?

She was a real woman they've put into the drama, which is a really clever idea. Years ago, someone had told me about a book called *The Wilder Shores of Love* [1954, by travel writer Lesley Blanch]. It's an account of the lives of four quite extraordinary women. And one of them is Jane Digby [1807–81]. In the last part of her life, which is where we see her, she was married to an Arab sheik, Medjuel el Mezrab, and she spent half the year with the Bedouin in the desert in Syria.

How did she cope in this environment?

Digby was more than capable of living that life, she was a brilliant woman. She raced camels, she fought in inter-tribal warfare, she knew how to look after animals and she gained a great deal of respect from her adopted people. What is very appealing is that this last part of her life was also the happiest. She was deeply in love. And she absolutely adored the Bedouin and the way of life, so she was a fulfilled woman.

What was her life like before this?

A quarter of her life would be enough for most of us! She had several marriages and many, many lovers. She was a great romantic, but she was also a fearless and remarkable woman who spoke and read nine languages. She was very cultured. To me, it's clear that one of the reasons she was able to live the way she did was because she came from an aristocratic background, and she had some money.

She was able to get divorced young [and three times in total over her life], and then just go off to travel and have marvellous adventures. The skills she brought to living in the desert, she had

learned as a country woman in Norfolk. Her grandfather [the politician Thomas Coke, Earl of Leicester] owned Holkham Hall in Norfolk.

She's sometimes described as a bohemian – is this accurate?

She was more than that. Bohemians can be bohemians and sit around in salons, but she was out there. She lived a life that not many *people* could live, let alone women of her generation. She was able to live without physical security and that's brave.

How does she feature in the series?

Journalist Abigail Fix [played by Leonie Benesch] is desperate to find Phileas Fogg [David Tennant] and she asks Jane to take her to a very dangerous part of the desert. Initially, Jane is intolerant of the naivety of this young Englishwoman, but she's won over by Fix's determination. **H**

Around the World in 80 Days is expected to be broadcast on BBC One this Christmas



Jane Digby (Lindsay Duncan) traverses the desert in a scene from the new BBC Jules Verne adaptation



Filled with mincemeat and topped with rum, this is a delectable Christmas treat

TASTE

Mincemeat omelette

The words “mincemeat omelette” tend to conjure up a vision of Fanny Cradock in an evening gown – and she did, indeed, attempt to popularise it in the 1970s. But Cradock drew a great deal on the past, and her mincemeat omelette is merely a muted version of this, published 70 years before. With its festive flavours, it makes an excellent Christmas breakfast, although it was originally intended to be served as a sweet.

Difficulty: 2/10 **Time:** 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

5 eggs
2 tbsp cream (single or whipping)
2 tbsp rum or cognac
1 tsp caster sugar
Pinch of salt
55g/2oz butter
3–4 tbsp mincemeat, heated to cook the suet
To serve:
3 tbsp rum or cognac
Caster sugar, to taste

METHOD

Whisk the eggs with the cream, rum or cognac, sugar and salt. Melt the butter in a thick-bottomed pan until foamy and lower the heat. Pour in the eggs, and stir with a fork until curds form (as if making scrambled eggs). Once the pan is around half curds, stop stirring and allow the bottom to fully set, leaving the top slightly runny. Gently add the mincemeat, and flip one half of the omelette over the other, before sliding the whole out on to a heated plate. Heat the rum or cognac for the flambéeing. Immediately before serving, sprinkle caster sugar over the omelette, top with the heated spirit and, carefully, set it on fire.

Recipe adapted from Alfred Suzanne’s 1904 *La Cuisine et Pâtisserie Anglaise et Américaine*.

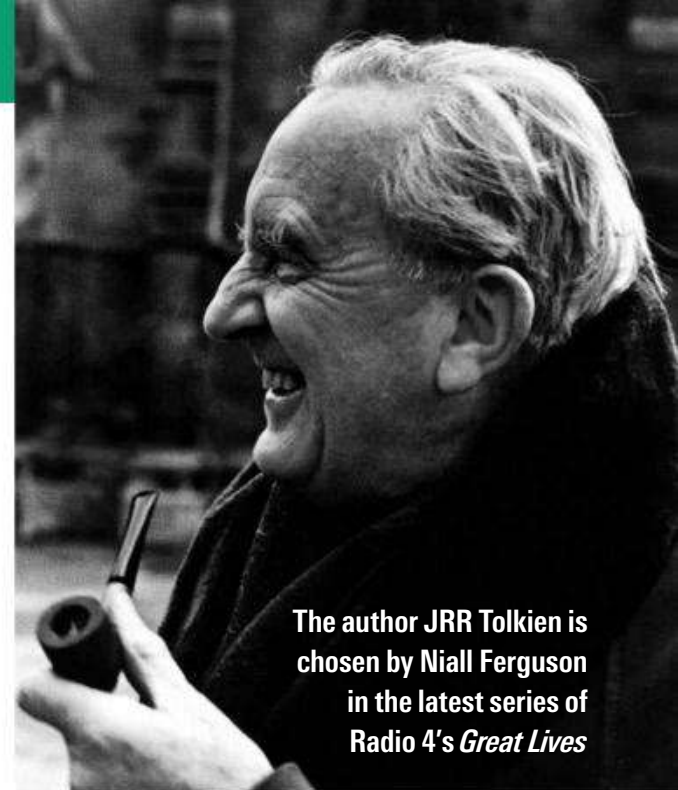
➤➤ To read more about **Christmas food through the ages**, read Annie Gray’s feature on page 30

LISTEN

Biographical surprises

One of the recurring delights of BBC Radio 4’s *Great Lives* is when a guest chooses to discuss a historical figure you would never have guessed they admired. In an episode in the new series, for example, historian Niall Ferguson, senior fellow of the Hoover Institution, selects John Ronald Reuel Tolkien as a figure to be celebrated – and, in Ferguson’s estimation, rescued from hippy fans of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

“The fascinating thing to me is that his sensibility is so profoundly conservative – with a small ‘c,’” Ferguson notes of the writer and Oxford academic. “When you look at the man’s politics, he was such a reactionary!” Presenter Matthew Parris, seemingly not a man especially drawn to stories of elves and dwarves, isn’t so convinced Tolkien deserves rescuing.



The author JRR Tolkien is chosen by Niall Ferguson in the latest series of Radio 4’s *Great Lives*

Elsewhere in the series, *Spectator* columnist Rory Sutherland looks back at the career of Johnny Ramone, who wrote many of the punk band’s hits, and actor Nina Sosanya discusses the extraordinary life of Jeanne Baret, the first woman to circumnavigate the globe – which she did while disguised as a man.

Great Lives

BBC Radio 4 / Tuesday 7 December

VISIT

Classical curiosity

How did the ancient Greeks see the world? This is the question at the centre of the Science Museum’s new exhibition, delving into how ancient philosophers and thinkers made sense of the natural world through a combination of science, art and religion. Curiosity was key, too, from their attempts to understand the stars in the sky (as evidenced by an ancient celestial globe showing the constellations) to the creatures that lived in the seas surrounding the Greek islands.

The exhibition also includes a selection of medical instruments to shed light on how physicians such as Hippocrates learned about human anatomy.

Ancient Greeks: Science and Wisdom

The Science Museum, London / Until 5 June 2022 / Ticket required / sciencemuseum.org.uk



A gold headdress from c350–100 BC shows Athena, the goddess of wisdom

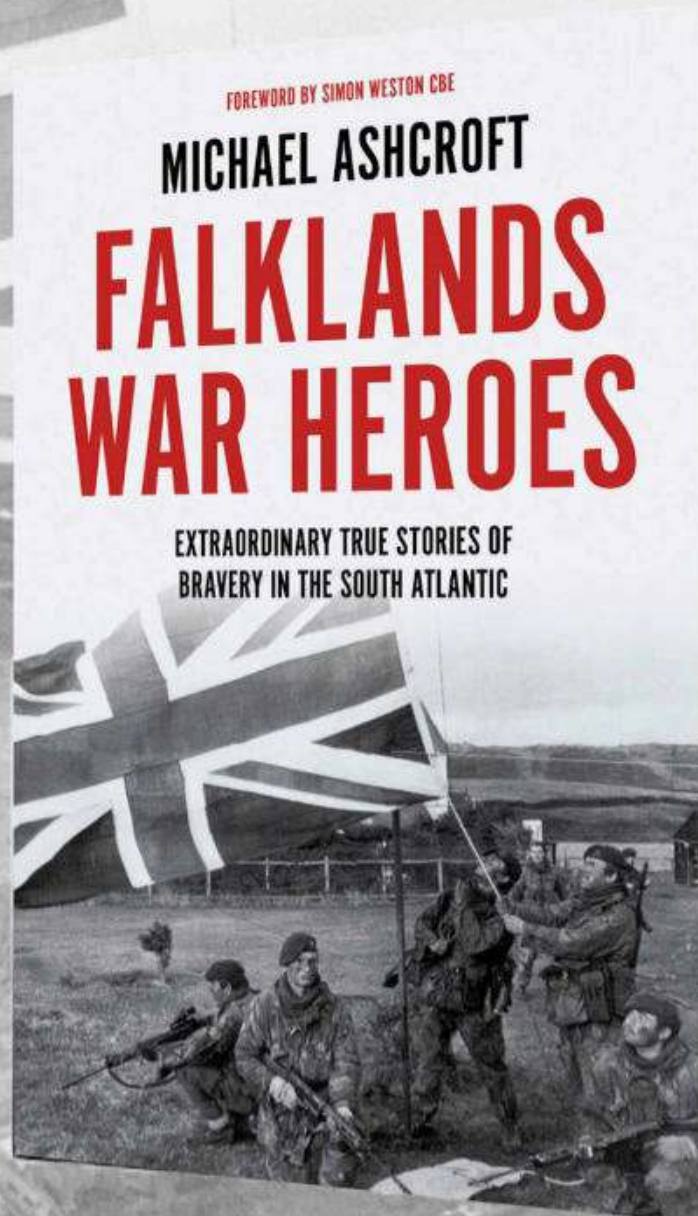
SAMANTHA NOTT/SCIENCE MUSEUM/ALAMY

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Christmas Card Appeal

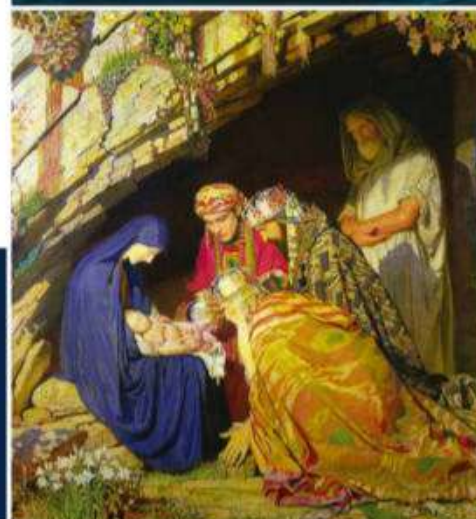
Every year, the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society pays over £1M in grants to the dependants of those lost at sea, as well as sick, disabled and retired seafarers struggling to make ends meet. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have received an unprecedented level of demand for financial assistance from members of the maritime community experiencing hardship and distress. Please help us to continue our important work – **thank you**.

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Some of the men of the RNLB *Solomon Browne*. In 1981, the lifeboat lost its eight-man volunteer crew in a dangerous rescue mission

LISTEN

Heroism at sea

On 19 December 1981, RNLB *Solomon Browne* launched from Penlee Lifeboat Station near Mousehole, Cornwall. Aboard was an eight-man volunteer crew, who battled through hurricane-force winds in a bid to reach the stricken coaster *Union Star*. The crew managed to get four people off the ship, but never made it back to shore. In total, 16 souls were lost that night.

Marking the 40th anniversary of the disaster, a drama-documentary, written by Callum Mitchell, weaves together monologue, radio communications and testimony from the lifeboatmen's families. It's a salute to the bravery of those who sailed towards danger and to the strength of their community.

Solomon Browne

BBC Radio 4 / Monday 20 December

VISIT

Inspired by history

Walter Scott is one of Scotland's most famous writers, with his novels and poems – often set in the rugged landscapes of the Highlands – capturing the imaginations of readers across the globe. But what inspired Scott himself? A new exhibition sets out to answer exactly that question, by displaying the historical objects that Scott was influenced by when writing his stories, along with the corresponding extracts from his works.

For instance, the display includes gilt brass rowel spurs (pictured) worn by Walter "Auld Wat" Scott of Harden, a raider who was active in the 16th and 17th centuries, which crop up in Scott's poem *The Reiver's Wedding*.

Inspiring Walter Scott

National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh / Until 9 Jan 2022 / nms.ac.uk



WATCH

Bitterness and recriminations

In 1963, with their marriage falling apart, Ian Campbell, the 11th Duke of Argyll, sought a divorce from his wife, Margaret. These were proceedings that were always going to attract media attention, but that in itself doesn't explain the scandal that followed in a divorce that would become notorious thanks to its salacious details.

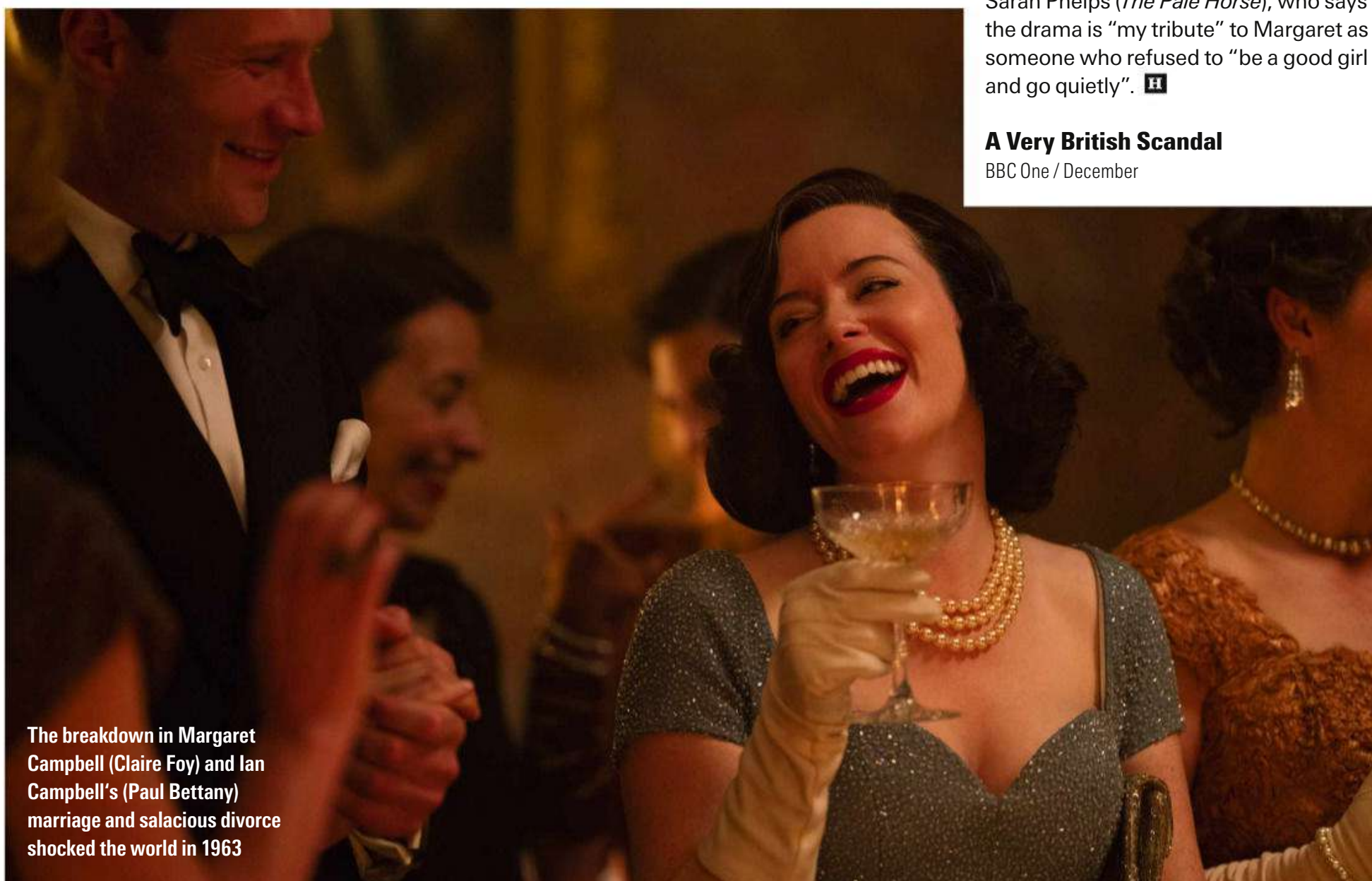
For Margaret, a charismatic socialite, this was a personal disaster. Accused of infidelity, she found stories of financial impropriety, theft and drug-taking swirling around her name. Worst of all were photographs, and one sexually explicit image in particular, that tarnished her reputation.

How should we look back at this case? From the makers of *A Very English Scandal*, a new BBC drama considers whether Margaret suffered because of institutional misogyny, and portrays her as someone who behaved with great bravery and dignity.

Leading a starry cast, Claire Foy (*The Crown*) and Paul Bettany (*WandaVision*) play the warring couple. The script is by Sarah Phelps (*The Pale Horse*), who says the drama is "my tribute" to Margaret as someone who refused to "be a good girl and go quietly". **H**

A Very British Scandal

BBC One / December



The breakdown in Margaret Campbell (Claire Foy) and Ian Campbell's (Paul Bettany) marriage and salacious divorce shocked the world in 1963

IT WOULDN'T BE
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RadioTimes

ON SALE 7 DECEMBER

#ChristmasRadioTimes

RadioTimes

Brunel's iron giant

SS *Great Britain* was once the largest and most technologically advanced ocean liner in the world. Now preserved in Bristol, it stands as a testament to Victorian engineering and the bravery of those who climbed aboard to begin new lives in faraway lands, as **JON BAUCKHAM** discovers

On a summer's day in 1970, the corroding hulk of SS *Great Britain* was towed into Bristol's Floating Harbour. The pioneering steamship, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, had spent several decades rusting away in the Falklands, but thanks to a feat of engineering brilliance befitting of Brunel himself, the vessel was roused from its ocean slumber and transported nearly 8,000 miles back to its West Country birthplace.

Since then, SS *Great Britain* has arguably become as much of a Bristol icon as Brunel's other masterpiece, the Clifton Suspension Bridge, which spans the Avon Gorge a short distance away. Restored to its mid-19th-century grandeur, the ship is a popular tourist attraction, devoted to the stories of the craftsmen who built it and those who sailed on board: from families braving the voyage to Australia in the pursuit of gold to merchant seafarers in the South Atlantic.

A visit begins by descending a flight of

stairs to the base of the Great Western Dry Dock, where the SS *Great Britain* started life in 1839 and where it sits again today.

Submerged beneath a glass "sea", guests can get up close to a replica of the ship's screw propeller – an innovation of the time – and wander around the colossal iron hull, further deterioration of which is prevented courtesy of a dehumidification machine. Climbing back up to ground level, the journey continues inside a museum on the ship's port side, guiding visitors through its history in reverse chronological order: from its role as a decrepit floating warehouse in Port Stanley until being scuttled in the 1930s, right back to its early service as a transatlantic passenger liner, launched by Prince Albert in 1843.

The most fascinating aspect of the display concerns SS *Great Britain*'s time as an emigrant clipper owned by merchants Gibbs, Bright & Co, when it undertook more than 30 voyages to Melbourne between 1852 and



MAX MCCLURE/GETTY IMAGES/ MARION MORRISON/SOUTH AMERICAN PICTURES



The rusting hulk of SS *Great Britain* returns to Bristol in 1970 after being towed across the Atlantic Ocean

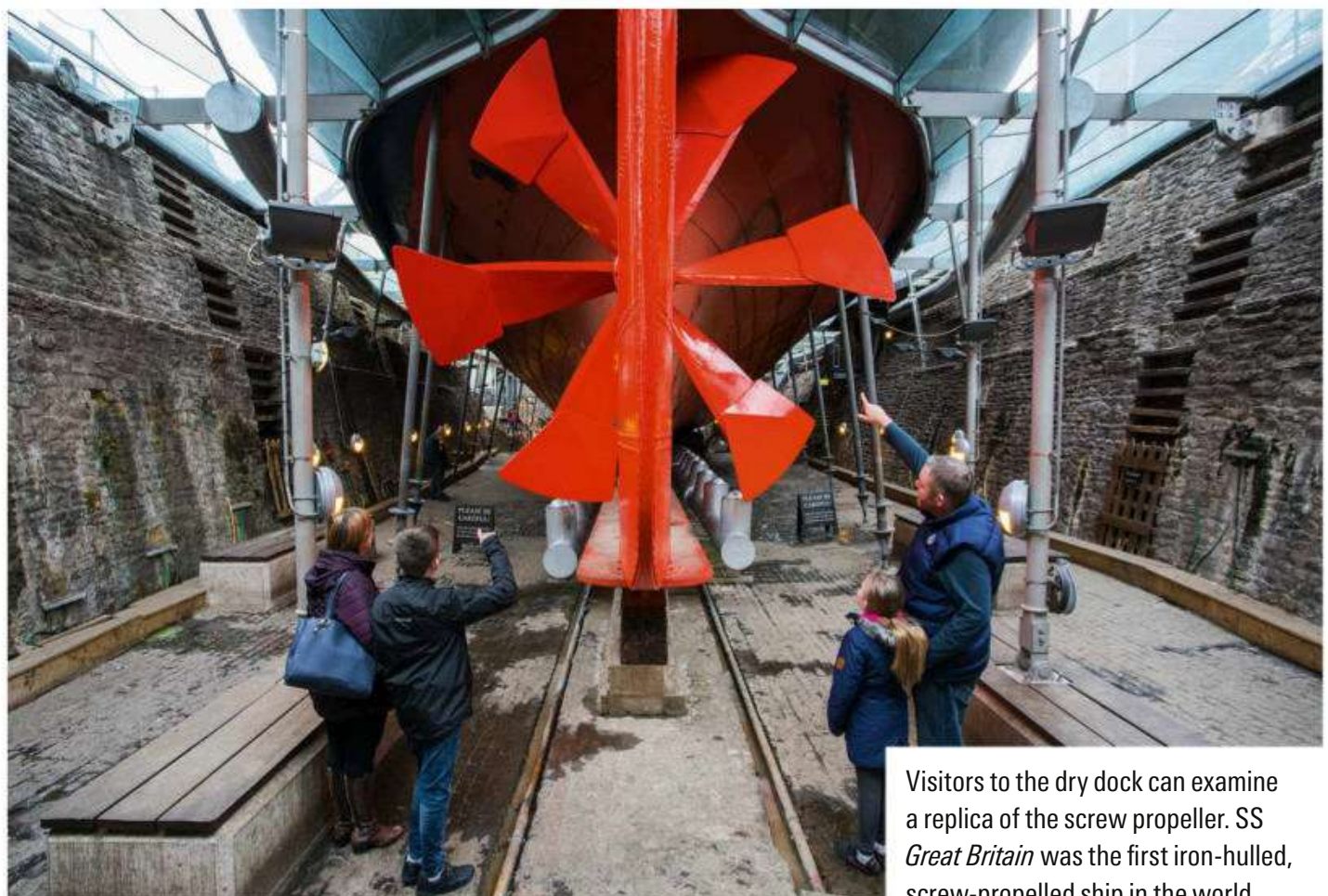
Having been scuttled in the Falkland Islands in 1937, the ship was in a dire state when raised; once in Bristol, extensive restoration efforts got under way



SS Great Britain at its birthplace, the Great Western Dockyard in Bristol. Today, between 150,000 and 200,000 people visit the museum ship every year



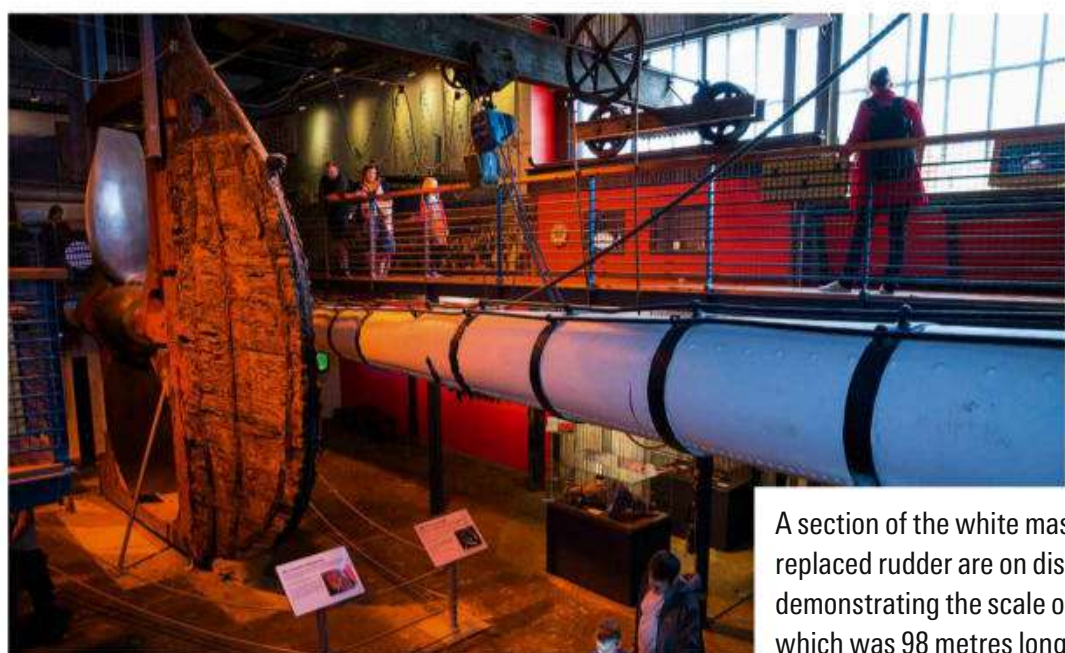
Isambard Kingdom Brunel at the launch of one of his other historic steamships, the *SS Great Eastern*, in 1858, the year before his death



Visitors to the dry dock can examine a replica of the screw propeller. *SS Great Britain* was the first iron-hulled, screw-propelled ship in the world



Steerage has been recreated as it would have looked in the mid-19th century when emigrants were transported to Australia



A section of the white mast and the replaced rudder are on display, demonstrating the scale of the ship, which was 98 metres long

// Venture inside a 26-foot-tall model of Brunel's head, where a film imagines the workings of his mind //

1875. It is this chapter that has inspired the exhibits inside the ship itself, where the sights, sounds – and in some cases, smells – of an emigrant's journey can be experienced by all those who climb aboard. The labyrinthine corridors of wooden bunks that made up the steerage accommodation have all been recreated in painstaking detail, as has the steam engine that formed the vessel's beating heart prior to its conversion to a sailing ship during the 1880s.

Only a few years ago, a trip to *SS Great Britain* would have ended there, but the site has recently been enhanced with the addition of a second museum building, which focuses on the life and works of the ship's creator. It is

a balanced portrait of the stovepipe-hatted engineer, with his private diaries revealing his deep personal insecurities while other displays shine a light on his greatest failures (a section focusing on the doomed south Devon atmospheric railway, which was abandoned in 1848, demonstrates a stubborn reluctance to heed advice from his contemporaries). Bizarrely, the museum also lets guests venture inside a 26-foot-tall model of Brunel's head, where a film imagines the workings of his mind.

Once back outside, visitors can enjoy a bite to eat in the two museum cafes or wander around the dockyard and explore its scattered maritime artefacts. But it's hard to resist craning your neck back towards the ship in all its Victorian splendour – a sight likely no less impressive than when it departed the same harbour nearly 180 years ago. **H**

Jon Bauckham is the production editor at our sister title, *BBC History Revealed*

VISIT For more information on planning a trip to the *SS Great Britain*, go to ssgreatbritain.org



The stern of *SS Great Britain*, decorated in the centre with the Bristol coat of arms, which shows a ship sailing from the city, flanked by a pair of unicorns

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CHRISTMAS QUIZ 2021

LOOK OUT
FOR ANOTHER
FESTIVE QUIZ
ON OUR
PODCAST



'Tis the season to test your knowledge of all things historical with our fiendish festive quiz

COMPILED BY **JUSTIN AND STEPHANIE POLLARD**

Twelve days of Christmas

1. **25 December:** What was stolen from Westminster Abbey on this day in 1950?
2. **26 December:** On this date in 1898, Marie and Pierre Curie announced a discovery. What had they been first to isolate?
3. **27 December:** What eased a child's entry into the world for the first time in 1845?
4. **28 December:** Where was Constance Markievicz when she became the first woman to be elected to the British House of Commons on this day in 1918?
5. **29 December:** Whose murder was witnessed by Edward Grim on this day in 1170, which he later documented?
6. **30 December:** Who was murdered in the home of Prince Felix Yusupov in 1916?
7. **31 December:** Who, in 1759, bought a 9,000-year lease on the St James Gate industrial site in Dublin for £45 per year?
8. **1 January:** Which newspaper published its first edition under its current name on this date in 1788?
9. **2 January:** On this date in AD 366, the Alemanni crossed which frozen river to invade the Roman empire?
10. **3 January:** Which two men were excommunicated by popes on this day in 1521 and 1962, respectively?
11. **4 January:** What technological marvel ended its life in a fireball on this day in 1958?
12. **5 January:** Which French soldier was stripped of his rank in a "degradation ceremony" on this day in 1895, leading Émile Zola to pen the open letter "J'Accuse...!"?

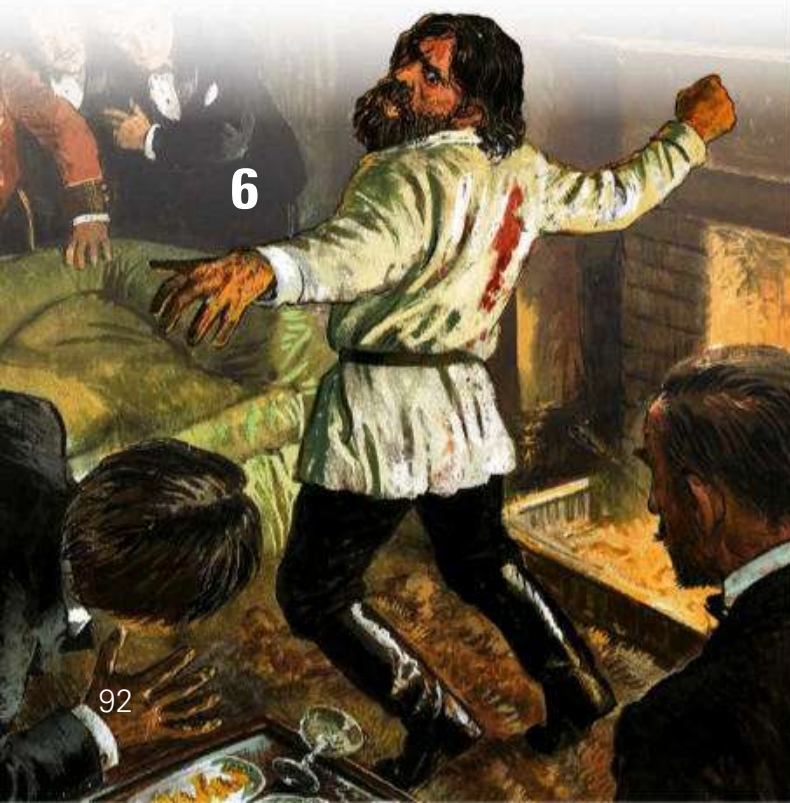


Festive feasts

13. Which of these wasn't a meat dish on the first published Christmas menu (1660)?
 - a. Swan Pye
 - b. A kid with a pudding in his belly
 - c. A turkey roast and stuck with cloves
 - d. Carpe in puff paste
14. A shortage of which vegetable in 2010 saw its price by weight rise close to that of turkey?
15. Howard Hughes kept a ruler in his hotel room to ensure that he was never sent oversized whats?
16. Which vegetable was illegal in France between 1748 and 1772?
17. Kaiser Wilhelm II wore the uniform of a British field marshal when eating what?

Bah! Humbug!

23. According to George Bernard Shaw: "It is an indecent subject; a cruel, gluttonous subject; a drunken, disorderly subject; a wasteful, disastrous subject; a wicked, cadging, lying, filthy, blasphemous and demoralising subject." What is it?
24. Possibly the most famous bank hold-up in Texan history occurred on 23 December 1927 in Cisco, provoking the largest ever manhunt in the state. What was unusual about the robber's disguise?
25. Which oppressed group instigated the Christmas Uprising in 1831?
26. What was George Washington doing on Christmas night 1776 instead of celebrating?
27. What event at Christmas 1836 gave the Snowdrop Inn in Lewes its name?



Christmas cards

18. In which countries did 19th-century and early 20th-century Christmas cards show children being stuffed into baskets by a devil?
19. In 1927, which US president issued the first official Christmas message to the American people?
20. Who sent a Christmas card to every single Grenadier Guard in 1942?
21. Whose commissioned surrealist Christmas card of a headless angel playing the lute was rejected by Hallmark?
22. What socially unacceptable act was on the first ever Christmas card in 1843?



BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY/REAMTIME

Picture round: the Nativity

What do these pairs of characters have in common?



28



29



30



31



32



33



History headlines in 2021

34. In January 2021, whose Massachusetts house came up for sale with a price of \$2 million, despite being the scene of the grisly murders of a husband and wife there?

- a. Bonnie Parker
- b. Lizzie Borden
- c. Ma Baker

35. In March, 9,000-year-old items, including a stone tool, were uncovered on Skokholm island, off the Pembrokeshire coast. What was unusual about their excavators?

- a. They were convicted criminals
- b. They were schoolchildren
- c. They were rabbits

36. In April, a piece of the Wright brothers' pioneering aircraft, known as the Wright Flyer, flew how far?

- a. 1 mile
- b. 6,433 miles
- c. 300 million miles

37. In May, what possession of Mary, Queen of Scots was stolen from Arundel Castle?

- a. Her rosary beads
- b. Her shoes
- c. Her dog's collar

38. In June, a family put up for sale one stone from their garden rockery. What was unusual about it?

- a. It contained a fossilised dinosaur
- b. It was a second-century AD Roman stela
- c. It contained a gold nugget

39. In July, a school teacher in Germany found what hidden in the walls of his auntie's house?

- a. His uncle
- b. The Iron Crown of Lombardy
- c. A hidden stash of Nazi memorabilia

40. In September, the Gilgamesh Dream Tablet (pictured right), containing one of the oldest recorded stories in history, was returned to which country?

- a. Iraq
- b. Iran
- c. India



40

2022 anniversaries

41. After more than 3,200 years in hiding, who emerged from KV62 100 years ago?

42. Which sporting event first occurred 150 years ago at the Kennington Oval?

43. What did Lord Mansfield's legal decision in the Somerset case, 250 years ago, find to have no basis in common law in England?

44. Which wife of two kings and mother of two more was born 900 years ago?

45. The 14th Roman emperor ordered the building of what 3 to 4-million-tonne structure, 1,900 years ago?

46. Fifty years ago, Shirley Chisholm became the first major party African-American and female candidate for what role?

Quiz answers

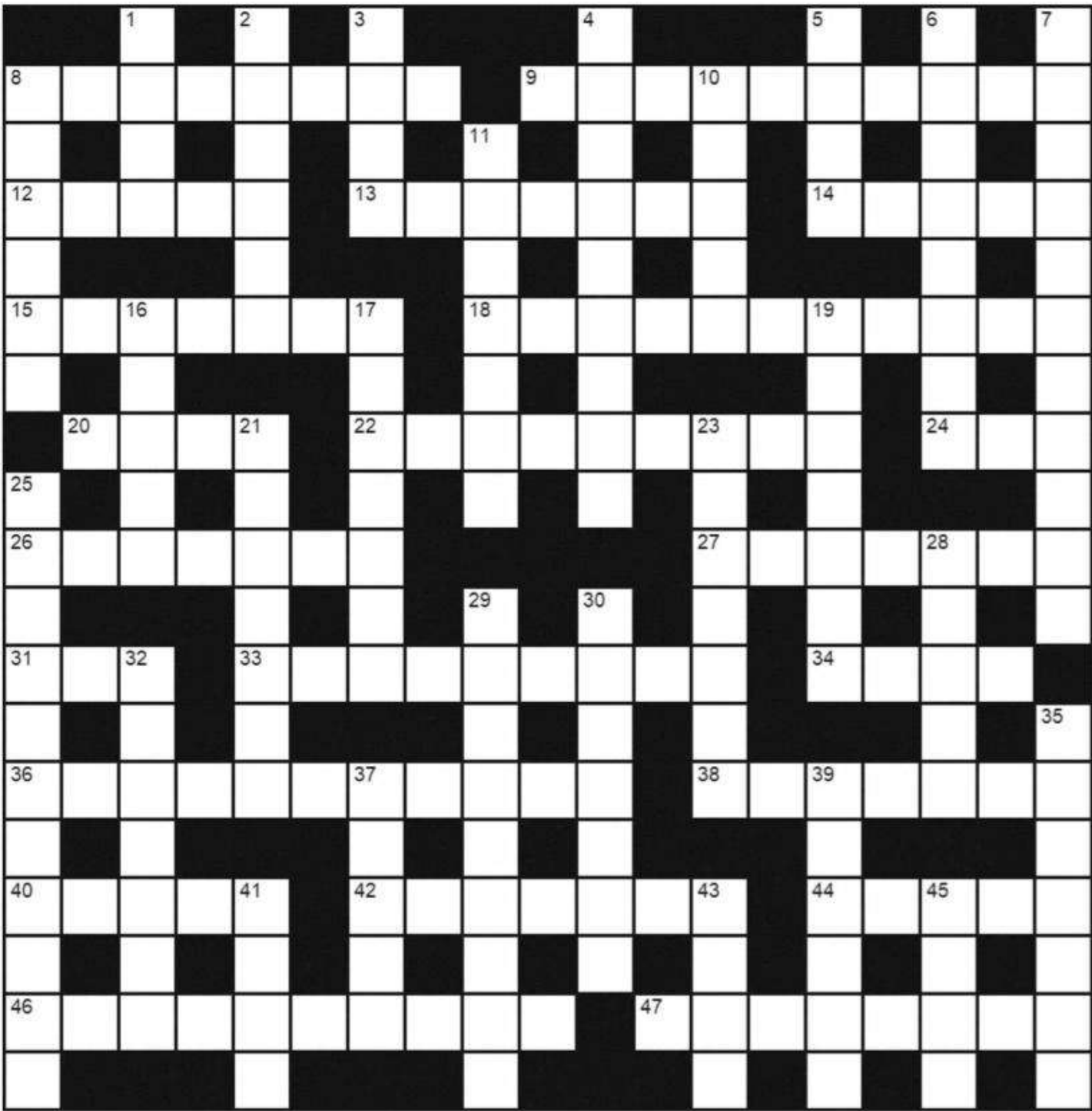
Picture round – the Nativity
28. Both married men called Joseph
29. Mary and Kato Svanidze (the wife of Joseph Stalin)
30. Both discovered stars (the star of Bethlehem – Jesus and Jonathan Frakes (who lived in Bethlehem, US))
31. Both discovered stars (the star of Bethlehem and pulsars) – the Magi and Jocelyn Bell
32. Both were carpenters – Alan Shepard
33. Both are shepherds – the New Testament shepherds and Joseph and Harrison Ford
34. Lizzie Borden
35. It was a second-century AD Roman stela
36. c. 395 million miles were rabbits
37. a. Her rosary beads
38. b. Her shoes
39. A hidden stash of Nazi memorabilia
40. Iraq
41. d. Carpe in puff paste
42. Crossing the Delaware
43. Enslaved people in the Santa Claus
44. He was dressed as Bahi Humbug!
45. A toddler being given a glass of wine
46. Appointed colonel that year
47. Elizabeth, who had been Queen, Calvin Coolidge
48. Princess, now was the Krapus, a horned creature
49. Austria and Germany – the "devil"
50. British history

Christmas cards
1. The Stone of Scone
2. Radium
3. Ether anaesthetic was used for childbirth for the first time by Dr Crawford Long in Georgia, US
4. Arthur Guinness
5. Thomas Becket
6. Grigori Rasputin
7. The Rhine
8. Martin Luther and Fidel Castro
9. Sputnik 1
10. Peas
11. Plum pudding
12. Potatoes
13. Carrots
14. Peas
15. Peas
16. Potatoes
17. Plum pudding
18. Carrots
19. Peas
20. Peas
21. Plum pudding
22. Potatoes
23. Carrots
24. Peas
25. Peas
26. Potatoes
27. Plum pudding
28. Carrots
29. Peas
30. Peas
31. Plum pudding
32. Potatoes
33. Carrots
34. Peas
35. Peas
36. Potatoes
37. Plum pudding
38. Carrots
39. Peas
40. Peas
41. Plum pudding
42. Potatoes
43. Carrots
44. Peas
45. Peas
46. Potatoes
47. Plum pudding
48. Carrots
49. Peas
50. Peas

PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

- 8 Native American leader, said to have helped found the confederacy of the "Five Nations" of the Iroquois (8)
- 9 Celebrated document of 1215, subjecting the English king to the rule of law (5,5)
- 12 Surname of American writer and eccentric; her Paris home was a salon for leading writers and artists between the two world wars (5)
- 13 Ancient land in what is now north-east Iran, where an empire, lasting about 500 years, was founded by Arsaces I (7)
- 14 A colleague (and later rival) of Richard Burton in the quest for the source of 43 down (5)
- 15 Roman literary patron remembered for his correspondence with Cicero (7)
- 18 Name, adopted in 1984, of the landlocked west African country that gained full independence from France in 1960 (7,4)
- 20 The alliance of forces fighting the Allies in the Second World War (4)
- 22 The first such law, introduced in William and Mary's reign in 1689, restrained the monarch's control over military forces (6,3)
- 24/1 Historical name given to an area around Dublin, beyond which English authority did not prevail (3,4)
- 26 German artist renowned for his portraits; the "King's Painter" to Henry VIII of England (7)
- 27 Last in a sequence of historical periods named after the materials used for tools and weapons (4,3)
- 31/45 Chinese military leader, alleged to have plotted against Mao, who died in a plane crash in 1971 (3,4)
- 33 A byname for English king Richard I (9)



The Tollund Man, who was naturally mummified in a peat bog. What period does he date from? (see 27 across)



What is the name of this Chinese military leader, who died in 1971? (see 31/45)

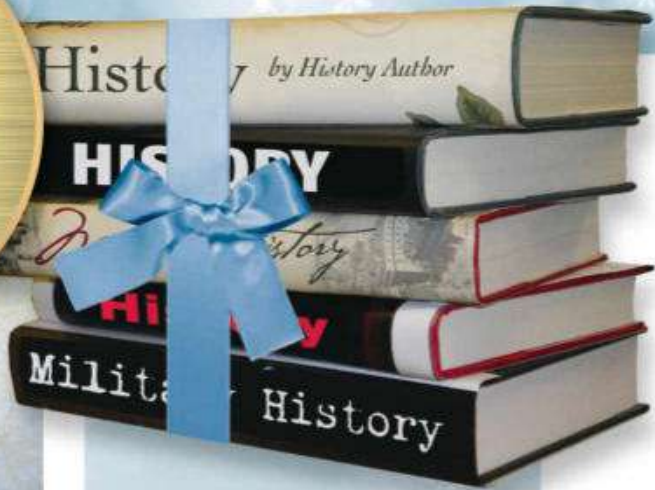


- 34 Thomas ____, 19th-century British poet/humourist; or Samuel ____, 18th/19th-century British admiral (4)
- 36 In Greek mythology, the queen of the Amazons, killed by Achilles (11)
- 38 Italian who masterminded the failed plot to overthrow Elizabeth I in 1571 (7)
- 40 Latinised name for the legendary city of Troy (5)
- 42 French name of the Belgian town that was the stronghold of the dukes of Brabant in the Middle Ages (7)
- 44 An ancient unit of measurement based on the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (5)
- 46 The ____, a secret agreement with Scottish Covenanters signed by King Charles I in December 1647 (10)
- 47/5 Legislation of 1956/1968 to control smoke in the atmosphere of London particularly (5,3,4)

Down

- 1 See 24 across
- 2 Village in Brittany, site of thousands

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**Solution to our
November 2021
crossword**

Across: 1 Liege 4 Frock coat 11 Islay 12 Great Stink 13/9 Anne of Cleves 14 Navarre 16 Staithe 18 Tyndale 20 Fathoms 25 Belisarius 27 Arthur 28 Runciman 29 Scotland 30 Tostig
Down: 2 INF Treaty 3/23 Golda Meir 5 Russia 6 Cricket 7 Callanish 8 Aryan 10 Visor 15 Aldershot 17 Hammurabi 19 Liberia 21 Anson 22 Alfred 24 Edric 26 Ruins

Seven winners of *How to Slay a Dragon*
J Tarelli, South Lanarkshire; C McDonald, Glasgow;
A Baird, Northumberland; P Fisher, Cheshire;
J Bourne, Essex; D Bateson, Glos; M Tucker, Wilts

A 1909 painting depicts Polish soldiers in the 17th century. But what are troops from the light cavalry unit fighting here called? (see 8 down)



- of prehistoric standing stones (6)
- 3** Name, arising from hunting terminology, for an official who keeps discipline within a political party (4)
- 4** She overthrew her husband Peter III, becoming ruler of Russia for 34 years (9)
- 5** See 47 across
- 6** For example, a bone or stone tool from an archaeological dig (8)
- 7** Known as Walyer by the Europeans against whom she led a rebellion in Tasmania in the 19th century (11)
- 8** Member of a light cavalry unit, originating in 15th/16th-century central Europe (6)
- 10** Acronym, adopted in the 1920s, for the British Armed Forces canteen services provider (5)
- 11** Historically, gold, gifts etc, given by one ruler to another by way of allegiance or acknowledgement of subjection (7)
- 16** Dutch island off which the battle of _____, a naval engagement in the Third Anglo-Dutch War, was fought (5)
- 17** Byname of Kentigern, traditionally the first bishop of Glasgow (2,5)
- 19** Ancient city (in present-day Turkey)

- founded by Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's generals (7)
- 21** Name applied to military technology aimed at making aircraft etc "invisible" to enemy radar (7)
- 23** For example Amelia Earhart (pictured below), who disappeared while making a round-the-world attempt in 1937 (7)
- 25** South-east Asian country which rebelled against Spanish rule in 1896 and against the US, to whom the country had been ceded, in 1899 (11)
- 28** For example Bikini, whose inhabitants were relocated in 1946 to make way for US nuclear tests (5)
- 29** William Petty, 2nd Earl of _____, Whig prime minister during the reign of George III (9)
- 30** 19th-century physicist Michael _____, whose name is associated with the Royal Institution's Christmas Lectures (7)



- 32** Chinese city called the "Southern Capital"; scene of a 1937 massacre (7)
- 35** Name of a number of British Royal Navy ships, the most famous one being launched in 1765 and preserved today as a historic relic (7)
- 37** The first of several sultans of this name, who ruled 1512–20 and raised the Ottomans to leadership of the Muslim world (5)
- 39** Nazi concentration camp in Germany, established in the early weeks of Hitler's coming to power (6)
- 41** Members of an ancient Persian cultic clan, in particular followers of Zoroaster (4)
- 43** Burton led the Royal Geographical Society expedition, in the 1850s, to find its source (4)
- 45** See 31 across

Compiled by
Eddie James

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Second World War week

Join us from 6–10 December, as we mark the 80th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a catalyst for the USA's entry into the war. We'll also be exploring other key moments, including Dunkirk and D-Day, plus offering fresh interpretations of figures such as Churchill and Hitler. A series of articles, podcasts and quizzes will take you from appeasement to VJ Day.

historyextra.com/period/second-world-war



Sex in the Middle Ages

Medieval views on sex are sometimes characterised as accepting of excessive violence, or otherwise almost comically repressed. Is this a fair portrayal? Not so, explains Dr Katherine Harvey who was interviewed for our HistoryExtra podcast.

historyextra.com/medieval-sex



Your guide to King Charles II

How did Charles come to the throne? How many children did he have? And why is the title the "merry monarch" less flattering than you might think? Clare Jackson presents a guide to the royal and the Restoration.

historyextra.com/charles-ii



Rival queens?

Anne Boleyn and Catherine of Aragon are often portrayed as rivals: the scorned Catholic on one side and the reformist seductress on the other. But, argues Kate McCaffrey, they may have had more in common than the histories make out.

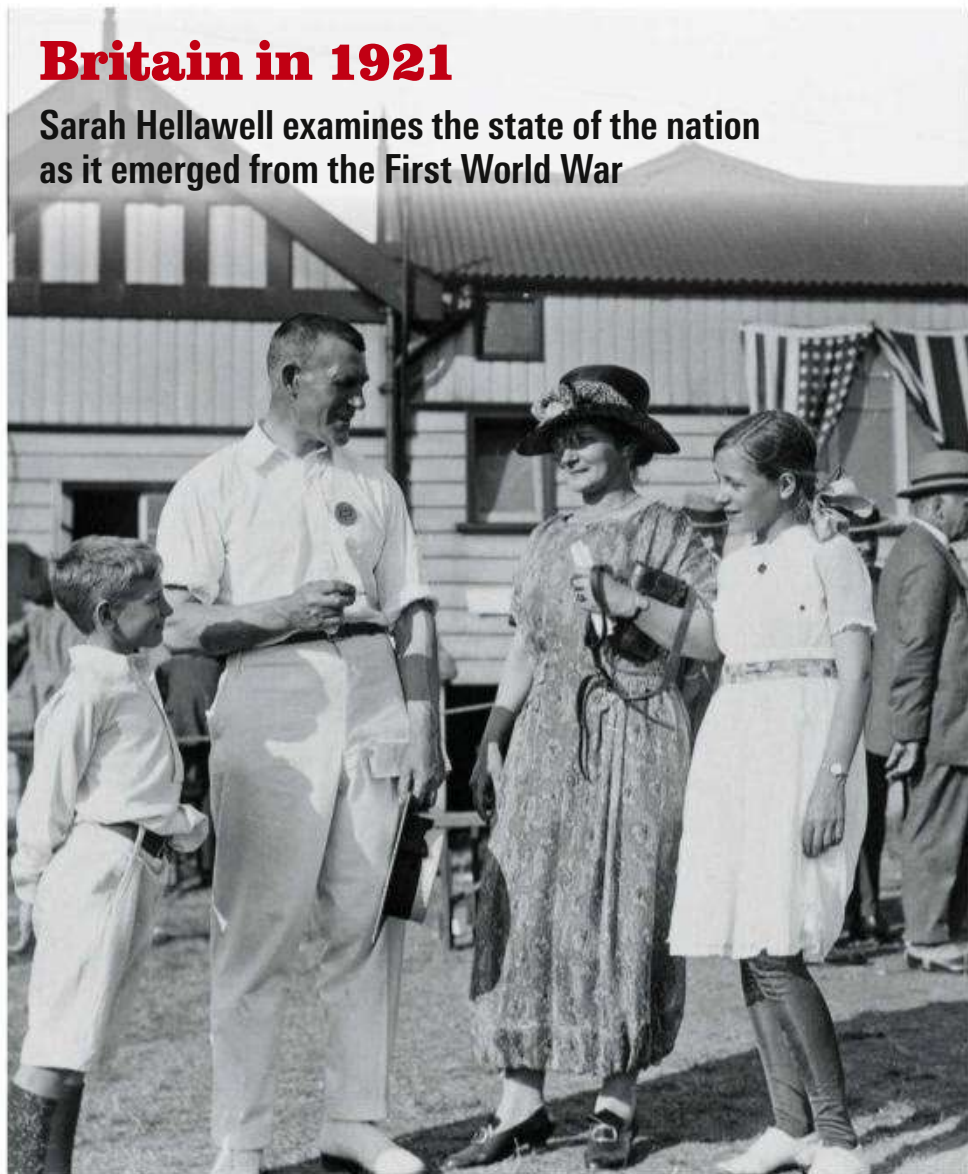
historyextra.com/catherine-or-anne

NEXT MONTH

January issue on sale 29 December 2021

Britain in 1921

Sarah Hellawell examines the state of the nation as it emerged from the First World War



Slave uprising

Thomas Harding on his family's connections to the 1823 uprising of enslaved people in Demerara



The BBC begins

David Hendy explores the corporation's origins in the first of a new series of pieces on the history of the BBC



A saintly scourge

Matthew Gabriele and David M Perry on the contradictions of French king Louis IX

MY HISTORY HERO

Satirist and broadcaster *Ian Hislop* chooses

Alfred the Great

849–99

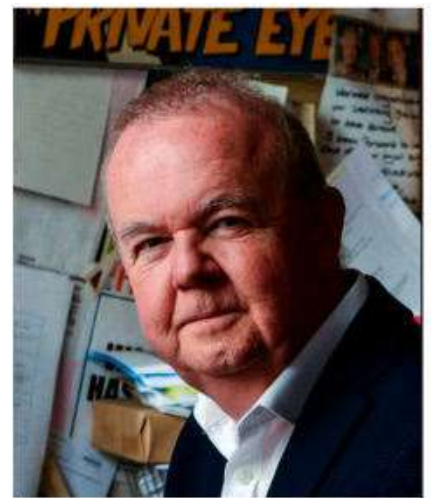


Alfred the Great, shown in a c1300–40 miniature. "His success in repelling the Vikings helped to create a sense of national identity among England's disparate kingdoms," says Ian Hislop

IN PROFILE

Alfred the Great was king of Wessex from 871–99. He won a decisive victory against the Vikings at the battle of Edington in 878, and successfully defended his kingdom against further Viking attacks. Generally considered an enlightened warrior king, he brought scholars to his court, translated key texts from Latin and improved England's legal system and defences.

// The emphasis Alfred placed on learning, language and literature shows him to be a figure enormously ahead of his time **//**



When did you first hear about Alfred? I got the Lady-bird children's book about him at school and have been interested in him ever since.

Ian Hislop is editor of *Private Eye*, and a team captain on the BBC quiz show *Have I Got News For You*. The *Private Eye Annual 2021*, edited by Ian, is out now

What kind of man was he? Alfred was clever and insightful without being duplicitous. However, there was a certain amount of elbowing people out of the way to ensure that history would recognise his achievements. I doubt whether he really did let the woman's cakes burn while on the run from the Vikings – but the story has been a great inspiration for not very good historians!

What made Alfred a hero? His success in repelling the Vikings and helping to create a sense of national identity among England's disparate kingdoms. He not only set up a system of burhs [fortified settlements] to defend the country against the invading Vikings, but convinced Englishmen that they could stand up to the Norsemen. The emphasis he placed on learning, language and literature also shows him to be ahead of his time.

What was Alfred's finest hour? I'd say there were two. Firstly, saving a version of Anglo-Saxon England from the Danes. Secondly, fusing his military and diplomatic skills with the power of the church to create a united kingdom of England.

Would there be an England as we know it today without Alfred? No. It would have been a very different place and may well have been a split kingdom. It's sometimes forgotten that the Normans built upon an established English kingdom – the system of the hundreds and the shires, and a version of civil society that might work – that was largely Alfred's creation.

Are we in danger of losing sight of his greatness? Yes, the popular view seems to be that nothing much happened in England between the Romans leaving and the Normans arriving, and that our ancestors simply ran around in the dark during the intervening years. Believe me, it's a lot more interesting than that!

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about him? He played people off against each other, and thought that anything was acceptable against the pagans. But his achievements far outweigh his defects. He wasn't called "the Great" by accident!

What would you ask Alfred if you could meet him? In the same way I asked my parents, who lived through the Second World War, what it was like not knowing we were going to win, I'd like to know if he really believed if he was going to triumph over the Vikings. **H**

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In Radio 4's *Great Lives*, guests choose inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs6



Ian Hislop was talking to York Membership

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